ゼロの使い魔
3
〈始祖の祈祷書〉
ヤマグチノボル
MF文庫J

Novel Illustrations

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ゼロの使い魔3
ヤマグチノボル

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ゼロの使い魔3　始祖の祈祷書

異世界・ハルケギニアに使い魔として「召喚」されてしまった才人。可愛いけれど魔法の才能はゼロのご主人様・ルイズとともに、アンリエッタ王女から頼まれた任務を無事果たした。ルイズは自分を守るために戦ってくれた才人を意識しはじめ、着替えや洗濯を自分でやったりして、ちょっぴり優しく接するようになる。だが、才人は急に変わったルイズの態度に「嫌われて警戒されてる……」と勘違いして卑屈になってしまい、全然かみ合わない毎日が続いていた。そんな折、ルイズはアンリエッタの結婚式の巫女役を仰せつかる。巫女は『始祖の祈祷書』を持って詔をとなえるのが役目で、ルイズは学院長から『始祖の祈祷書』を預かるが……。

ヤマグチノボル（やまぐち・のぼる）

1972年2月、茨城県生まれ。『カナリア～この想いを歌にのせて』（角川スニーカー文庫）でデヴュー。著書に『グリーングリーン鐘ノ音ファンタスティック』『つっぱれ有栖川』（共に角川スニーカー文庫）『描きかけのラブレター』（富士見ミステリー文庫）『グリングリーン鐘ノ音スタンド・バイ・ミー』（MF文庫J）など多数。小説連載も数多く手がけている（富士見ファンタジアバトルロイヤル等）。『グリーングリーン』『Gonna Be??』『ゆきうた』『私立アキハバラ学園』『魔界天使ジブリール』『そらうた』など、ゲームシナリオライターとしても活躍中。

Illustration

◎兎塚エイジ（うさつか・えいじ）

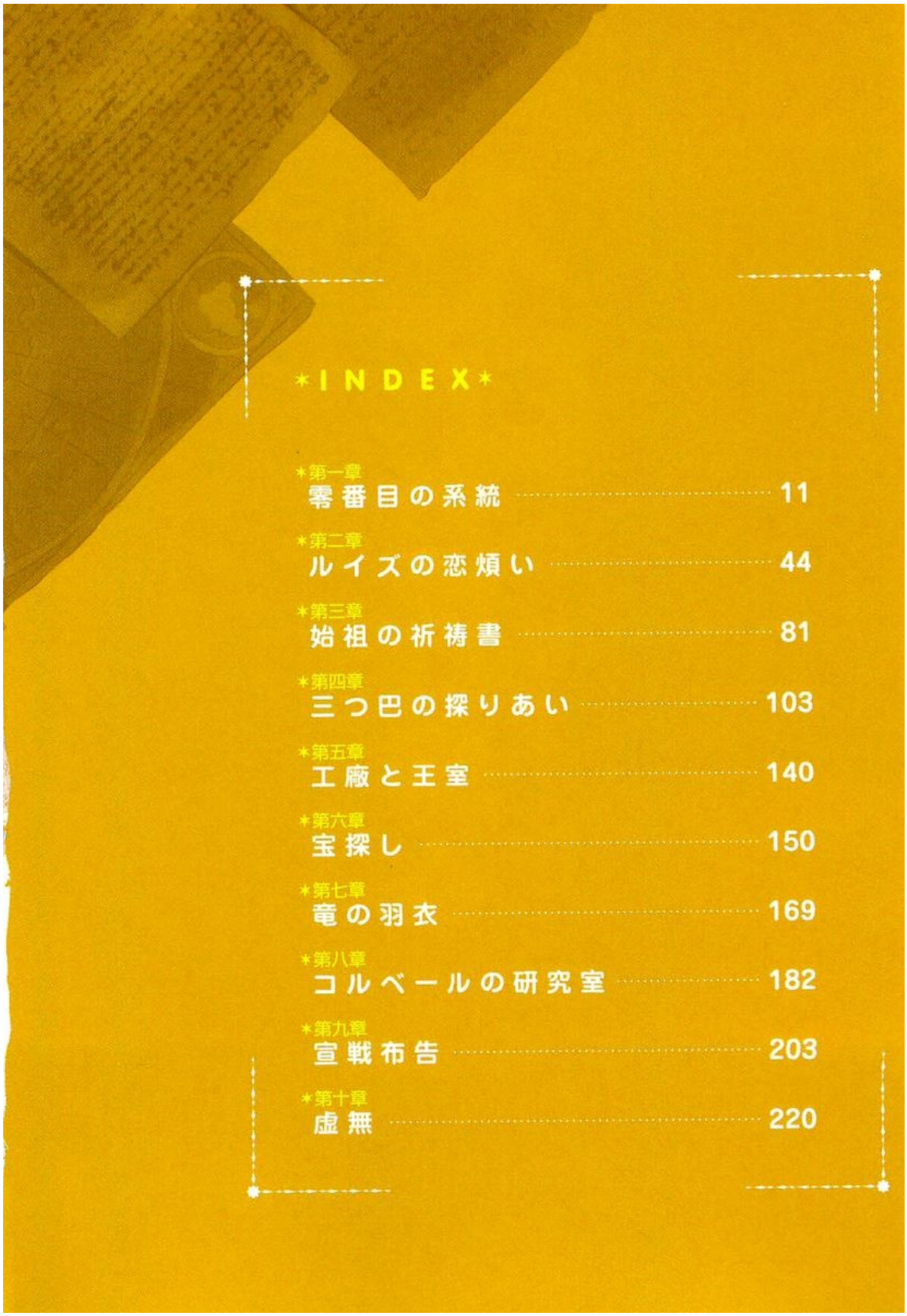
大阪出身、大阪在住の大阪人。8月16日生まれ。
現在、サラリーマンをしながらイラストを描かせて頂いてます。
今までの参加作品は「道士さまといっしょ」（電撃文庫）です。

カバーイラスト／兎塚エイジ　装丁／blue

ゼロの使い魔 3

〈始祖の祈祷書〉

ヤマグチノボル



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シエスタ
魔法学院のメイド。才人に憧れていて、なにかと世話をやいてくれる。
青銅のギーシュ
（ギーシュ・ド・グラモン）
ちょっとキザっぽいルイズの同級生。使い魔のモグラを溺愛している。
雪風のタバサ
（本名？？）
キュルケとは仲がいい。無口でクール、本を読むのが好きで、放っておくといつまでも読み続けている。
微熱のキュルケ
（キュルケ・アウグスタ・フレデリカ・フォン・アンハルツ・ツェルプストー）
その美貌とプロポーションでなびかなかった男はいないのが自慢。ルイズとは大の仲。
ゼロのルイズ
（ルイズ・フランソワーズ・ル・ブラン・ド・ラ・ヴァリエール）
才人の主人様。魔法は失敗してばかりのおちこぼれだが、貴族としての誇りは人一倍強い。
サイト
（平賀才人）
ルイズによって異世界から召喚された青少年。ごく普通の高校生で剣道が好きな性格。

ゼロの使い魔3
始祖の祈祷書

ヤマグチノボル

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Chapter One: Lineage of Zero

Tristain's Royal Palace was situated at the end of Bourdonne Street. Members of the Mage Guards patrolled the area in front of the Royal Palace gates atop their magical steeds. The rumor that war was looming had begun spreading through the town two or three days ago. It was said that “Reconquista”, the aristocrat faction that had conquered Albion, was poised to invade Tristain.

As a result, the mood of the soldiers who guarded the surroundings grew tense. In the skies above the Royal Palace, magical beasts and ships alike were banned from flying, and people who passed the gates were thoroughly checked.

Even tailors, confectionery shop employers, and traders were stopped and inspected thoroughly at the gates in order to prevent mages disguised through illusion or people under the control of charming magic from getting through.

Due to such circumstances, when a wind dragon appeared in the skies above the Royal Palace, the garrison of Mage Guards grew alarmed.

The Mage Guards was composed of three corps, and each guarded the Royal Palace, one at a time. While one was on duty, the other two either rested or trained. Today, the Manticore Corps was on duty. Riding atop their manticores, the nobles flew up and headed towards the wind dragon that had appeared above the Royal Palace. There were five figures on the wind dragon's back, as well as a huge mole that was held in between the dragon’s mouth.

The Mage Guards warned them that this was a prohibited flight zone, yet the wind dragon, ignoring the warning, landed in the palace courtyards.

Atop the dragon was a beautiful blondish pink-haired girl, a tall lady with burning red hair, a blond boy, a small, petite girl with glasses and a boy with black hair. The boy carried a long sword over his shoulder.

The manticore guardsmen quickly surrounded the wind dragon and drew their

rapier-shaped wands, assuming a stance with spells at the ready. A strongly-built, rough-mustached commander bellowed a warning at the suspicious intruders.

“Drop your wands!”

Instantly, the expressions of the intruders grew hostile, but the short blue-haired girl amongst them shook her head.

“Royal Palace.”

The party nodded reluctantly and, as ordered, threw their wands on the ground.

“Flying above the Royal Palace is currently prohibited. Didn’t you know that?”

A girl with blondish pink hair lightly jumped off the dragon, and introduced herself in a firm voice:

“I am Duke of La Vallière’s third daughter, Louise Françoise, not someone suspicious. I request an audience with her Highness, the princess.”

The commander twisted his moustache as he watched the girl intently. He knew about the Vallière Duchy. After all, they were a very renowned noble family.

The commander lowered his wand.

“You are Duke of La Vallière’s third daughter?”

“Indeed.”

Louise raised herself and stared straight into the commander’s eyes.

“I see... you have your mother’s eyes. Well, what is your purpose here?”

“I’m afraid I cannot tell you. It’s a secret.”

“Then I’ll have to deny your request. I cannot grant you an audience with her Highness without knowing your purpose. I could lose my head over something like that!” the commander replied worriedly.

“It's not like we can reveal our secret either!” yelled Saito as he jumped off the wind dragon.

As Saito interjected, the commander glanced over at him. He had a young face. Clothes that he had never seen before. A low nose. Yellow skin. A large sword draped over his shoulders.

Though it wasn’t clear what country he was from, one thing was certain – he wasn’t a noble.

“What a rude commoner. That’s not how a servant should speak to a noble. Stay silent.”

Saito narrowed his eyes, and turned to Louise. It was too much for him. True, he wasn’t even a servant. In fact, he was just a familiar, but it was the commander's disdainful tone that infuriated him. Gripping the handle of Derf over his shoulder, Saito turned to Louise and asked,

“Hey, Louise. Can I take care of this guy?”

“Quit boasting. Just because you beat Wardes doesn’t mean you can act so arrogantly.”

Overhearing their conversation, the commander’s eyes widened. Wardes? Wardes, as in Viscount Wardes, the commander of the Griffin Corps? Defeated? What's the meaning of this?

Shaking away his concern, the commander raised his magic wand again.

“Who the hell are you people? Regardless, I cannot allow you to see Her Highness.”

The commander spoke in a stern tone. The situation was quickly getting out of hand. Louise stared at Saito.

“W-what?”

“It's because of you and your blabbering that they think we're suspicious!”

“It’s all because of that bearded man and his damn attitude!”

“Shut up. You should have just kept your mouth shut!”

Watching the strange scene ahead of him, the commander quickly seized opportunity of the situation. The Mage Guards that had surrounded the party quickly raised their wands.

“Arrest them!”

Under the commander’s order, the mage guardsmen were about to begin their incantations when suddenly...

A person clad in a purple mantle appeared from the palace gates. Seeing Louise surrounded by the Mage Guards, she frantically ran over.

“Louise!”

Seeing the figure of Henrietta rushing over, Louise’s face shined like a rose.

“Princess!”

Under the gazes of the Mage guards, the two embraced one another in a hug.

“Aah, you came back safely. I’m glad. Louise, Louise Françoise…”

“Princess...”

Louise’s eyes began watering with tears.

“The letter... it is safe.”

Reaching into her breast pocket, Louise gently pulled out the letter. Henrietta nodded and firmly grasped Louise’s hands.

“You really are my best friend.”

“Your words are too kind, Princess.”

However, upon noticing the absence of Wales in the midst of the party, Henrietta’s expression grew somber.

“As I thought... Prince Wales sacrificed himself for his kingdom.”

Louise closed her eyes and nodded quietly.

“... But what about Viscount Wardes? I don’t see him, did he take another route? Or did he... perhaps... fall by the hands of the enemy? But if it was the Viscount, shouldn’t...”

Louise's face turned grim. With much difficulty, Saito explained to Henrietta.

“Wardes was a traitor, Princess.”

“Traitor?”

A shadow crept upon Henrietta’s face. Then, noticing the intent stares of the Mage Guards around them, Henrietta quickly explained.

“They are my guests, commander.”

“I see.”

Upon hearing this, the commander withdrew his wand, somewhat unwillingly, and told his troops to do the same.

Henrietta turned to Louise again.

“What exactly happened on your trip? .... Anyway, let’s withdraw to my room before we continue. The rest of you, please get some rest in the other rooms.”

Leaving Kirche, Tabitha and Guiche in the waiting room, Henrietta brought Saito and Louise to her own room. Henrietta sat down on a small and delicate chair, her elbows placed upon the desk.

Louise explained the entire situation to Henrietta.

How Kirche and the others joined them en route.

How they took a ship to Albion and were subsequently attacked by pirates.

How they found out that the pirate leader was Crown Prince Wales.

How Prince Wales refused to escape, even when he had the chance.

How they missed the ship because of the wedding with Wardes.

How Wardes suddenly showed his true colors in the middle of the wedding...killing Prince Wales and snatching the letter from Louise’s hands...

which was swiftly regained.

... And how the ‘Reconquista’ had vast ambitions...from uniting all of Halkeginia, to the grand goal of liberating the Holy Lands from the Elves.

However... even with the alliance between Tristain and Germania now secure, Henrietta still mourned.

“That Viscount was a traitor… How can that be? To have a traitor within the midst of the Mage Guards...”

Gazing at the letter she herself wrote to Wales, tears built up and streamed down her cheeks.

“Princess…”

Louise silently held Henrietta’s hands.

“It was I who took away Prince Wales' life. No matter how you look at it, it was I who chose the traitor to be the messenger…”

Saito shook his head.

“The Prince had already planned on staying in his kingdom. It was not Your Highness’s fault.”

“Louise, did he, at the very least, read my letter?”

Louise nodded.

“Yes, princess. Prince Wales read Your Highness's letter.”

“Then, Prince Wales didn‘t love me.”

Henrietta sorrowfully shook her head.

“Then... even after you urged the Prince to escape?”

Henrietta nodded whilst gazing at the letter in sorrow.

Louise recalled Wales' words. He kept stubbornly telling her that “Henrietta didn’t tell me to escape”. It was just as Louise had thought - a lie.

“Ahh, with your death, there is no longer any hope. What about me, my lost love?”

Henrietta muttered softly in her daze.

“Was honor more important than I?”

But Saito came to a different conclusion. Wales remained not because he was trying to protect his honor. Rather, Wales remained so as to not give Henrietta any trouble... and to show the traitors that the royal families of Halkeginia were certainly not to be trifled with.

“It isn’t as you think, Princess. It was because he did not wish to give Tristain any troubles, that he remained in that country. That is how I see it.”

Henrietta looked up at Saito blankly.

“To not give me any trouble?”

“His escape, as the Prince said, would only have given a perfect excuse for traitors to invade.”

“Even if Prince Wales didn’t flee here, they would still invade here given the chance. But, without a reason to invade, peace can be kept. At the cost of his life, he prevented the rise of war.”

“... Even then, he still didn’t want to give trouble. Surely...”

Henrietta, sighing deeply, looked outwards from the window.

Saito slowly repeated the words he had remembered.

“To fight with bravery, to die with courage. That... was what he asked me to say.”

Henrietta replied with a cheerless smile. When a princess, as beautiful as a

delicate rose, became like this, even the air itself grew heavy. Saito's heart ached at the sight.

Henrietta, resting her elbows on the table beside a beautifully engraved marble statue, questioned sadly.

"To fight with bravery, to die with courage. That's your privilege as men. But what of those who are left behind, what are they supposed to do?"

Saito was struck silent. He had nothing to say. Lowering his head downwards, he awkwardly nudged his shoe against the couch.

"Princess… If only I had tried harder to convince Prince Wales..."

Henrietta stood up and clasped the hand of the muttering Louise.

"It's all right, Louise. You splendidly accomplished your mission by retrieving the letter. You should not have to be worried about anything because I didn't ask you to tell him to escape."

Henrietta laughed with a smile.

"With the obstacle that could have broken the marriage now removed, our country will be able to step into the alliance with Germania safely. In such a situation, Albion will not be able to invade us easily. The crisis has passed, Louise Françoise."

Henrietta said it as cheerfully as possible.

Louise took out from her pocket the Water Ruby that Henrietta had given her.

"Princess, here, I return this to you."

Henrietta shook her head.

"Please hold on to it. It's the least I can do to express my gratitude."

"I cannot dare to accept such a treasure."

"For such loyalty, an appropriate reward should be bestowed. It is all right, put it on."

Louise nodded and put it on her finger.

Upon seeing this, Saito remembered the ring he had removed from Prince Wales' hands. Taking it from the rear pocket of his pants, he placed it onto Henrietta's hands.

"Princess, this, is a keepsake from the Prince Wales."

Accepting the ring, Henrietta gasped in astonishment.

"Isn't this the wind ruby? Did you get it from Prince Wales?"

"Yes. In his dying moments, he passed the ring to me; he said to give it to Your Highness."

In truth, Wales was already dead when he pulled it off his finger.... but Saito had said it anyways. He had said it like that, believing that it would help heal the ache Henrietta held in her heart, even if just a little.

Henrietta put the Wind Ruby on her finger. Because it was for Wales, it was too large for Henrietta's fingers… But when Henrietta muttered the 'decreasing' spell, the ring became narrower and narrower, and soon it fit the finger snugly.

Henrietta lovingly stroked the Wind Ruby. Turning towards Saito, she gave a shy smile.

"Thank you, kind familiar."

A sad smile filled with grief, yet also a smile of gratefulness towards Saito. Such was the nobility of the smile that Saito was dumbstruck by its beauty, and could only mumble incoherently.

"That man, he died bravely. Is that right?"

Saito nodded.

"Yes. It was so."

Henrietta, whilst staring at the shining Wind Ruby, declared softly.

"Then I… I will live bravely as well."

On the flight from the Royal Palace to the Academy of Magic, Louise remained silent. No matter how much Kirche asked Louise and Saito what was contained in the contents of the letter Wales had written, the two kept their lips sealed.

"Oi, c'mon, won't you at least tell me what the mission was? And the fact that the Viscount was a traitor, it's all so shocking."

Kirche looked at Saito with a feverish glance.

"But darling fought him, right?"

Saito, having glimpsed Louise's face, nodded.

“Y-yes. But he escaped…"

“Still, that’s quite an achievement! Hey, what was that mission exactly?”

Saito lowered his head. Louise was even more silent, and neither spoke.

Kirche puckered up her brows and turned to Guiche.

“Hey, Guiche!”

“What?”

With an artificial rose in his mouth, Guiche, who was spacing out, turned around.

“Do you know what was in the letter Princess Henrietta sent us to retrieve?”

Guiche closed his eyes saying:

“I do not know well. Only Louise knows.”

“Louise the Zero! Why don’t you tell me?! Hey, Tabitha! What do you think? Well, I think that I am being treated like an idiot!”

Kirche shook Tabitha, who was reading a book. As she was being shaken, her head followed suit and shook as well.

Because of all the shaking by Kirche, the wind dragon lost balance and suddenly slowed down. Guiche, who was sitting on its back, lost his balance and fell down. “Gyaaaaaa!” he screamed as he fell, but since it was Guiche, no one noticed. Mid-way, he pulled out his wand, and using “Levitation”, floated down slowly, avoiding near-death.

Louise lost her balance as well, but Saito softly reached out and held her waist with his hand, supporting her body. Seeing the hand on her waist, Lousie blushed. *This morning, when running away from Albion, Saito kissed me. That time I was pretending to be asleep.*

But why? Why was I pretending to be asleep?

It might be love… However, I do not want to admit this thought, because Saito is my familiar; moreover, he is not a noble.

Loving a person who was not a noble was hard to even imagine. “Nobles and commoners are different kinds of people”… As Louise grew up with such beliefs, her uneasiness turned into puzzlement. Anyway, whether these feelings were true or not was not a matter of importance right then.

In the end, having felt Saito's hand move around her waist, Louise shouted in an angry voice:

“T-to be so bold, I’m going to get angry!”

“You looked like you were going to fall over. Like Guiche.” Saito replied, his face blushing as well.

“It’s all right, even if Guiche falls - it's just Guiche.” stated Louise, still bewildered from before.

“T-that’s, even if he falls he will be all right. It would be troublesome if you fell though, since you can't use magic.”

“You're just a familiar and you dare insult your master?”

Louise drew a sharp breath and quickly averted her gaze. However, she didn’t seem angry.

“You are being too daring. Hmph.”

Though Louise grumbled and complained, she didn‘t try to shake off Saito's hand. On the contrary, she leaned closer, snuggling against him. Yet, her face still remained averted. Saito stole a quick glance at Louise‘s face.

Her white cheeks were faintly dyed with pink and she was slightly biting her lower lip. Although Henrietta was beautiful... Louise was also incredibly cute, he thought. The hand on her waist pressed closer. And he felt how her waist and thighs pressed further into his body.

It was just when this was happening that Kirche spun around and muttered softly.

“Since when did you become like this, you two?”

Louise, suddenly realizing how things looked, blushed a furious red and sent the daydreaming Saito flying with a shove.

“Nothing happened! You idiot!”

Saito's scream trailed behind as he fell, but before he smashed into the ground, Tabitha, who was reading a book, dully swung her hand and put a 'Levitation' spell on Saito.

Saito landed gently onto the plains and saw Guiche, who had fallen before, walking on the grassy plain along the road with a bitter face.

Then Guiche stopped and addressed Saito in his usual snobbish manner.

“You fell too, right?”

Saito answered in a tired voice.

“I was pushed off.”

“T-they're not coming back, are they?”

Saito looked up into the sky. In the blue sky, the wind dragon quickly disappeared over the horizon.

“…It looks like it.”

“Well, let’s walk then. Sigh, it’ll take half a day on foot.”

With a depressed look on his face, Guiche started to walk. Saito was not sure why, but somehow, he felt more impressed by Guiche.

“By the way, you… that… well… There’s something I wanted to ask you. Please tell me.”

Guiche mumbled to Saito as he fiddled with his artificial rose.

“Huh?”

“Did Her Highness... well... have anything to say about me? Is it true that she’ll reward me after the mission, with the letter where the promised secret date is?”

For a moment, Saito felt pity for Guiche. Henrietta hadn’t even mentioned the letter “G” from Guiche’s name in their conversation.

“Let’s go.”

Saito, pretending he hadn’t heard anything, began quickening his pace. Guiche chased after him from behind.

“Well, is the rumor true?”

“Come on, walk. It’s good for your health.”

“Wha-at, y-you, Her Highness, I...”

Under the warmth of the sun, the two kept on walking towards the Academy of Magic.

The Fortress of Newcastle, once known as a great stronghold, was now a tragic ruin. Though it had withstood the onslaught, it had become a disastrous scene.

The castle walls, which were repeatedly attacked by spells and cannon fire, had turned into a pile of rubble, and corpses burnt beyond recognition littered the ground.

Although the siege had been short, the rebels - no, since Albion had lost its king, 'Reconquista' was the new government in Albion - had suffered unimaginable damage. For every three hundred royal army soldiers, two thousand rebels were killed. And with an additional four thousand wounded. It was hard to call the battle a victory, given these statistics.

Because the fortress was located on the very edge of the floating continent, it was possible to attack it only from one direction. Before the 'Reconquista' forces managed to get past the guards, they were repeatedly shot with magic and

cannon fire and received huge casualties.

However,in the end, they won through their sheer force of numbers. Once behind the castle walls, the king's defense was fragile. The king's army's mages were left to guard against the soldiers. But the mages' numbers were incomparable to the 'Reconquista' soldiers; they were gradually killed off, one by one, until they all fell.

Though the damage dealt to the enemy was great… the price was the annihilation of the king's army. It was literal annihilation, because the royalists had fought up to the last soldier.

In other words, the final decisive battle of the civil war in Albion: the siege of Newcastle’s fortress, where the royalists were outnumbered 100 to 1 and inflicted damage that was worth ten such armies… had become a legend.

Two days after the civil war had ended, under the blazing sun and between the corpses and pebbles, a tall aristocrat was inspecting the old battlefield in Albion. His hat was pushed to the side and he was dressed in unusual attire: the uniform of Tristain’s Royal Mage Guard.

It was Wardes.

A female mage with a hood over her eyes stood next to him.

It was Fouquet the Crumbling Dirt. She had escaped to Albion onboard the ship from La Rochelle. Last night, she had joined Wardes at a bar in Londinium, the capital of Albion, and now she had followed him to Newcastle’s battlefield.

Around them, 'Reconquista' soldiers were diligently scouring for riches. A loud cheer came from the treasury nearby: it seems a band had found some gold coins.

A mercenary with a pike on his shoulder was turning corpses over, then pushing them into a pile near rubbish as a decoration for the garden. When he found a magic wand, he cried out in joy.

Fouquet, who was watching the scene disapprovingly, clicked her tongue in disgust.

Noticing Fouquet's expression, Wardes laughed coldly.

“What’s wrong, Fouquet the Crumbling Dirt? Aren’t these men who are hunting for treasure your colleagues? Robbing nobles of their treasures was part of your job, wasn't it?”

“Do not compare me with them. I have no interest in the riches of the dead.”

“A thief with a thief’s ethics.”

Wardes laughed.

“I’m not interested in that. I only steal valuable treasures because I love to see the frantic expressions of the nobles. But these guys…”

Fouquet looked at the corpse of a royalist mage guardian with the corner of her eye.

“All right, all right, don’t be mad.”

“I guess Albion’s royal nobles are your enemies. Haven’t you, under the name of the royal family, disgraced your own family?”

Hearing Wardes exaggerated words, Fouquet, regaining her composure, coldly said with a nod.

“Oh well. Accidents happen.”

And then Wardes turned. The lower part of his left arm had been severed off. The uniform’s sleeve was loosely fluttering in the wind.

“It looks like it was a harsh battle for you too."

Wardes replied in a unchanging tone:

“An arm in exchange for Wales' life, I think, is a rather cheap trade.”

“He must be something, that ‘Gandálfr’, to be able to so swiftly cut off the arm

of a Square-Class Wind mage such as yourself.”

“Because he was a commoner, I just got careless.”

“Don’t put it like that. He even destroyed my golem. However, nothing within this castle could have survived.”

When Fouquet said so, Wardes smiled coldly.

“He is Gandálfr after all. The corps that attacked the castle didn’t report to have fought against such a person. Perhaps, during our fight, he had expended all his energy and was confused as a commoner. Probably, the soldier who killed Gandálfr didn’t even notice that he was the legendary familiar.”

Fouquet, not convinced, snorted. An image of Saito, a strange looking boy, floated in her mind. Could he really die so easily?

“And where is that letter?”

“Somewhere around here.”

Wardes pointed to the ground with the cane. That place, two days ago, had been the chapel, the place where Wardes and Louise tried to hold the wedding, the place where Wales lost his life.

However, now it was just a pile of rubble.

“Hmm, that La Vallière lass… your former fiancé, the letter was in her pocket?

“Correct.”

“You let her die? You didn’t love her?”

“Loved, loved not, I’ve already forgotten such sentiments.” dismissed Wardes in a neutral voice.

He drew his cane and chanted a spell. A small tornado appeared and started scattering around the rubble.

Gradually, the floor of the chapel was unveiled.

Between a portrait of Founder Brimir and a chair lay the corpse of Wales. It looked surprisingly unharmed.

“Look, isn’t it the dear Prince Wales?”

Fouquet said in a surprised voice. Fouquet, who was once one of Albion’s nobles, remembered Wales' face.

Wardes didn’t cast even a single glance at the remains of the man he had personally murdered; instead, he searched intently for Louise and Saito’s corpses.

However… their corpses were nowhere to be seen.

“Are you sure they really died here?”

Muttering so, Wardes began to search the surroundings carefully.

“Hmm… Look, isn’t that George de la Tur’s ‘Founder Brimir's Visit’?”

Fouquet picked up the painting from the floor.

“I think it is a reproduction. Mmm, come to think of it, this castle’s chapel must have been built to worship him… Hmm?”

Fouquet, having picked up the painting from the floor, discovered a widely gaping hole underneath, and called Wardes.

“Hey, Wardes. What is this hole?”

Wardes, with raised brows, squatted down and looked into the hole that Fouquet indicated. He realized that the hole must have been dug by that huge mole, Guiche’s familiar. On his cheeks, Wardes could feel the cold breeze emanating from the hole.

“Could it be that both Vallière’s youngest daughter and Gandálfr escaped through this hole?” Fouquet remarked. It was the truth. Wardes' face contorted in rage.

“Should we pursue them?”

“It is useless. If there’s wind inside, it must mean it was dug clean through.” Wardes replied exasperatedly. Seeing him like that, Fouquet grinned.

“It seems like you are capable of such expressions. And here I thought that you were a man without emotions… like a gargoyle… Why, oh why do such emotions appear on your face?” she mocked.

Hearing this, Wardes stood up.

From the distance, a person appeared while they talked.

He said in a cheerful, limpid voice.

“Viscount! Wardes! Have you found the letter yet? That… what was it... ah, love letter that Henrietta gave to Wales, the saviour that would prevent the union of Germania and Tristain. Have you found it?”

Shaking his head, Wardes answered the man who had just appeared.

The man was in his mid-thirties. He was wearing a round hat and a green mantle. From the first sight, one could tell that he was a clergyman. However, he also slightly resembled a soldier with his long aquiline nose and intelligent blue eyes. From the edges of his hat, curly blond hair peeked out.

“Your Excellency, it seems the letter slipped through this hole. It is my mistake. I am deeply regretful for my error. Please, hand me whatever punishment you deem necessary.”

Wardes kneeled down, bowing his head.

The man addressed as ‘Excellency’, with a friendly smile on his face, approached Wardes and tapped his shoulder.

“What are you saying? Viscount! You did a remarkable job! You single-handedly defeated the enemy’s brave general! Ah, isn’t that over there our dear Crown Prince Wales? Be proud! You defeated him! Apparently he loathed me deeply… but seeing him like that, I feel a strange sort of kinship to him. Aah, that’s right. Once dead, everyone becomes a friend."

Wardes’ cheeks flinched slightly, as he noticed the sarcasm at the end of the

speech. He quickly regained his composure, and once again repeated his apology to his superior officer.

“However, the mission to obtain the Henrietta’s letter that Your Excellency so desires ended in failure. I’m sorry I was not able to meet Your Excellency’s expectations.”

“Do not fret yourself. Compared to obstructing the alliance, killing Wales was by far more important. A dream is something that has to be obtained steadily, step-by-step.”

Then, the man in the green robe turned to Fouquet.

“Viscount, please introduce this beautiful woman here. Being a priest, it is inconvenient for me to speak with a woman.”

Fouquet watched the man. Before her eyes, Wardes bowed deeply to the man. However, she didn’t like him. He had a strange atmosphere surrouding him. A sinister aura was radiating from the gaps of his robe.

Wardes stood back up and introduced Fouquet to the man.

“Your Excellency, this is Fouquet the Crumbling Dirt, before whom all Tristain nobles shudder.”

“Oh! I heard the rumors! I am honored to meet you, Miss Saxe-Gotha.”

Hearing him say her noble name that she had abandoned long ago, Fouquet smiled.

“Did Wardes tell you this name?”

“That's right. He knows everything about Albion nobles. Genealogy, coat of arms, property… it is hard for an aging bishop to remember everything. Oh, let's not delay my introduction.”

Opening his eyes widely, and placing his hand over his chest...

“'Reconquista' first general, Oliver Cromwell at your service. You see, originally, I was just a mere bishop. However, due to the votes of the baronial council, I

was appointed as the first general, and I need to give my best. Though I am a clergyman who serves Founder Brimir, it is all right for me to ‘guide’ us through the dark times, right? If necessary, using faith and power for the better.”

“Your Excellency, you are not a freelance first general anymore, you are now Albion’s…”

“Emperor, Viscount.”

Cromwell laughed. However, his eyes didn’t change.

“Certainly, I really wished to prevent Tristain’s and Germania’s alliance, however, there are more important things. Do you understand me, Viscount?”

“Your Excellency's thoughts are so deep that an ordinary man like me cannot measure them.”

Cromwell opened his eyes wide. Then, he raised both hands and began talking with exaggerated gestures.

“Unity! Unity of steel! Halkeginia is us, a union of chosen nobles that will get back the Holy Land from those menacing elves! It is a mission given to us by Founder Brimir! ‘Unity’ is our number one duty. Therefore, Viscount, I trust you. There is no blame in such a trifling failure.”

Wardes bowed deeply.

“For this great mission, Founder Brimir blessed us with a special power.”

Fouquet's eyebrow rose. Power? What kind of power are they talking about?

“Your Excellency, what power has Founder Brimir granted Your Excellency with? If it is all right, I would like to know.”

Cromwell continued in a slurred tone, caught up in his own theatrics.

“Do you know about the four great elements of magic, Miss Saxe-Gotha?”

Fouquet nodded. Even children know of such things. Fire, Wind, Water, and fourth – Earth.

“In addition to the four great elements, there is another magical element. The element that Founder Brimir used, the element of zero. Really, it was the first element of all things.”

“Element of zero… Void?”

Fouquet turned pale. The lost element. The magic of nothingness that, as dark legends say, disappeared. Did this man know something about the element of zero?

“That is the power that Founder Brimir granted me with. For this reason, the Baronial Council agreed to make me the emperor of Halkeginia.”

Cromwell pointed at Wales' corpse.

“Wardes. I had wanted to make Crown Prince Wales my friend and ally. But alas, in life, he chose to be my greatest adversary; but now in death, he will become a great ally. Do you see anything wrong with that?”

Wardes shook his head.

“He should have never resisted Your Excellency's decisions.”

Cromwell laughed with a smile.

“Well then, Miss Saxe-Gotha. I will show the element of ‘Void’ to you.”

Fouquet breathlessly watched Cromwell’s movements.

Cromwell pulled out the cane that was attached to his waist.

A low, silent aria escaped from Cromwell's mouth. He was chanting words that Fouquet had never heard before.

When the aria was completed, Cromwell gently lowered the cane and aimed it at Wales' corpse.

Then… all of a sudden, Wales, whose body was already lifeless, opened his eyes. A chill ran down Fouquet’s spine.

Wales slowly sat up. A once bloodless face suddenly sprang back to the life it had previously held. Like a withered flower absorbing water, Wales’s body gradually imbued itself with life.

“Good morning, Crown Prince.”

Cromwell muttered.

The revived Wales returned Cromwell’s smile.

“It has been a long time, Archbishop.”

“How rude, I am an emperor now, my dear Crown Prince.”

“Is that so? I apologize for that, Your Excellency.”

Wales kneeled, taking the posture of a vassal.

“I think I’ll make you my personal bodyguard, Wales.”

“With pleasure.”

“Then, let’s be friends.”

Cromwell began to walk. Wales, who didn’t look like he was just dead, walked behind him. Then Cromwell, as if remembering something, halted and turned around saying,

“Wardes, do not worry. Even if the alliance is formed, it is of no matter. In any case, Tristain is helpless. There is no change in plans.”

Wardes bowed.

“There are two ways of diplomacy - the cane and the bread. Let’s give warm bread to Tristain and Germania for the time being.”

“As you wish.”

“Tristain is a necessary area to add. That royal family has the Founder's Prayer Book. I need to have it in my hands in order to retrieve the Holy Land.”

After saying this and nodding approvingly, Cromwell left.

It was only after Cromwell and Wales were out of sight, that Fouquet was able to open her mouth.

“That... was the void...? To revive the dead. That’s impossible.”

Wardes muttered.

“The void element manipulates life… That’s what His Excellency said, seems like he was right. Even though I cannot believe it as well, after witnessing this – how could I not?”

Fouquet asked Wardes in a shaky voice.

“A while ago you were acting very similar to this, perhaps you were affected by void magic too?”

Wardes laughed.

“Me? I am different. This is a result of a sorrowful life that I have led since birth.”

After that, Wardes looked up at the sky.

“However…many lives were sacrificed for the Founder’s Holy Land… what if they all will be revived by the element of ‘Void’?”

Frightened, Fouquet clutched her chest. She felt a light heartbeat. She suddenly felt the need to confirm that she was still alive.

“Don’t look that way. It was only my imagination. You could even call it my fantasy.”

Fouquet sighed, feeling relieved. Then she glared at Wardes.

“It was surprising, that’s all.”

Whilst patting the stump where his left arm had once been, he spoke softly.

“However, I myself also want to know. Is it a mere fantasy? Or reality? The answer lies in the Holy Lands... that’s how I feel.”

Three days after Saito and company had returned to the Academy of Magic, the marriage between Tristainian princess Henrietta and Germanian emperor Albrecht III was officially announced. The ceremony would take place the following month, before the conclusion of the military alliance.

The alliance conclusion would be held in Germania's capital Vindobon, where the letter of agreement was to be signed by the Tristain prime minister, Cardinal Mazarin.

The day after the alliance, a new Albion government was officially established. In an instant, tensions sparked between the two countries, but the Kingdom of Albion's First Emperor Cromwell sent a special envoy to Tristain and Germania at once, in order to sign a non-aggression pact.

As a result, both countries had a conference. Even with the two countries' combined airforce, they could not oppose Albion's fleet. Though the non-aggression pact felt more like a dagger pointed at the neck, the two countries didn't have much of an alternative, and this offer was the best they could hope for.

However…peace was established in Halkeginia only on the surface. Politicians could not sleep day or night. And it wasn't just the nobles; the commoners tensely awaited each day, as well.

Tristain's Academy of Magic was no exception either.

Chapter Two: Louise’s Lovesickness

The morning after her return from Albion, Louise’s attitude began to change. To put it bluntly, she became nicer. As usual, after waking up, Saito prepared the wash basin for Louise. He poured water into the basin and then washed Louise's face. It was troublesome, but if Saito forgot about the wash basin, severe consequences would follow.

Once, when Saito forgot to prepare the wash basin, he wasn’t allowed to eat. The next morning, he was quite angry, so he caught a frog from the pond behind the Academy of Magic and put it in the wash basin. Louise, who hated frogs, squealed at the sight of the slimy amphibian. She burst into tears when it suddenly appeared in front of her. Saito apologized profusely, but Louise did not forgive him for making her cry.

That time, unsatisfied with merely starving Saito, Louise tried whipping him, and as a result, Saito escaped the room and slept outside.

They would get into fights just like the one with the wash basin, but after going to Albion something changed. Warm feelings towards Saito started to sprout within Louise and vice versa. However, they did not realize each other’s feelings.

In the morning, Saito prepared the wash basin, feeling slightly awkward. Louise sat on her bed with a drowsy look.

With the wash basin placed on the floor, Saito scooped up water with both hands, but Louise didn’t move. Her pinkish blond hair dangled on her face. Seemingly tired, she rubbed her eyes. With an absent minded expression, she said, “Leave it there, I’ll do it myself.”

Saito was shocked. He didn’t think the words “I’ll do it myself” could come from Louise’s mouth.

“Louise?”

Saito waved his hand in front of her face. Louise pouted, facing away. She was blushing. As if she was angry, Louise said, “I’ll do it myself. Leave me alone.”

Louise dipped her hand in the wash basin, scooped up water, shook her head, and washed her face. Water splattered everywhere.

“So, you’re the type that likes to move their face while they wash it, huh?”

Louise was slightly taken aback by Saito's comment. Her face blushed and she became angry. “G-Got a problem with that?”

“No, not at all…”

Saito then took Louise’s clothes from her closet and laid them face down on her bed, while Louise put on her underwear. Saito, holding Louise's uniform, turned around when he thought she was done. The next step was dressing Louise.

When Saito turned around, Louise, wearing only her underwear, started to panic and quickly covered her body with sheets.

“Leave the clothes there,” said Louise, with half her face covered by the sheets. ‘’What happened?’’ thought Saito. ‘’She would normally say something like ‘Quickly dress me...’ with a sleepy face. What's more, she's hiding behind the sheets. Normally, she wouldn’t care about being seen. Why is she so embarrassed?’’

“Leave it there? Um... are you sure?”

Louise popped her head up above the sheets. “I said leave it there, didn’t I?!”

Louise then buried half of her face in the sheets again and glared at Saito.

Well this is strange, thought Saito as he placed the clothes beside Louise as he was told.

“Face that way.”

“Eh?”

“I said face that way.”

It seemed as if she was the type of person who didn’t want to be seen while changing. That's a very normal reaction for adolescent girls; however, Louise had been fine being seen in the past.

Saito turned his back to Louise thinking, *What the hell happened?*

Well, many things happened in Albion. Her fiancé had betrayed her and Henrietta. Her childhood friend. She had lost her lover. It was a horrible experience for Louise. Perhaps those events had changed her.

Had Louise really changed?

With an expressionless face, Saito remembered the feeling of Louise’s lips. He had kissed a half-asleep Louise softly on the lips while on the dragon. He knew that kissing someone in their sleep is cowardly and something that he ought not to have done, but he couldn’t control himself. He cared a great deal about her.

Could it be…, Saito thought. *That Louise knows about that kiss? She didn’t change because she felt I was dangerous and thought I was going to make a move on her, right?*

Saito stopped his thoughts abruptly and shook his head. If Louise had been awake at that time, she wouldn’t have kept quiet. She'd wake up. Get angry. Abuse. Any sense of harmony would have exploded into bits. Events like the time when I crept into her bed were horrible, weren’t they? A dog. That’s me, a dog. A dog that is led by a chain and goes ‘woof’.

Ah. I see now. Saito finally realized. *She feels uneasy because I crept into her bed two nights before we left for Albion while she was sleeping. This isn’t about the kiss at all. Ah, that’s why she doesn’t want my help changing anymore.*

Saito felt somewhat disheartened. In fact, he was deeply regretful. If only he hadn’t done such a thing. ‘’She doesn’t want me making a move on her. Well that’s only natural, but it means she doesn’t like me. That’s also natural I guess…’’

‘’It is only natural… yet saddening.’’

‘’A ray of hope? Nope. None. Louise doesn’t like me. I’m only a familiar. That being said, I’ve only been a dangerous familiar so far. A bad familiar that transforms into a wolf at night. A barrier has already been erected between us.’’

Dark clouds started forming. The hope inside Saito’s heart whispered desperately, “But on the way back home on the dragon, she cuddled with me, right?” The despair within Saito’s heart replied coldly, "That was just my imagination. She sent me flying when Kirche pointed it out, didn’t she?"

‘’… Ah, that’s right. There’s no mistake about it. Louise doesn’t think anything of me.’’

Realizing his own feelings for Louise, misery overwhelmed Saito. Saito had a personality where once excited, he would become extremely excited, but when depressed, he would become excessively depressed.

“What are you whispering about?”

Saito had not realized he was whispering. When he turned around, Louise, who had already finished changing, looked into his face dubiously.

After a mere twenty seconds of thought, he had reached his conclusion. Feeling dispirited, Saito replied in a sickly voice, “Sorry. I won’t talk to myself again.”

“Yes, it’s somewhat revolting.”

Louise, looking dubiously at Saito, walked out. “Come on, let’s go for breakfast.”

“Yeah,” Saito followed after her, depressed.

Even in the Alviss Dining Hall, something surprising occurred.

Saito sat down on the floor as always, but his plate of soup was not there. Saito grew impatient. *Did I do anything to make Louise angry enough to not feed me? No, I don’t think so.*

Last night, after the five of them returned to the academy, they reported to Osman. Osman, who had already heard from Henrietta, thanked and praised them for their efforts.

Then they had returned to their rooms … and quickly fallen asleep. Saito hadn't done anything to anger Louise. With a miserable look on his face, Saito looked up at Louise, who was sitting on a chair.

Louise started blushing and while turning away she said, “From now on, eat at the table.”

“Eh?” Saito looked blankly at Louise. That was very unexpected of Louise.

“Come on, sit down quickly.”

Dumbfounded, he sat next to Louise. Malicorne, who always sat there and had caught a cold, started to protest, “Hey Louise, that’s my seat. What do you mean you’ll let your familiar sit on it?”

Louise glared at Malicorne. “If you don’t have a seat, then just go get a chair.”

“Don’t play around with me! Letting a commoner familiar sit down while I have to go get a chair? That’s just wrong! Hey familiar, piss off, that’s my seat. This is a dining table for nobles!”

The chubby Malicorne tried to look intimidating, but he was trembling slightly. This was the legendary familiar who supposedly defeated Guiche and caught Fouquet. What's more, it seemed they had accomplished some incredible feat while they were away from the academy the past couple of days. Malicorne was covered in cold sweat when he told Saito off.

Saito, feeling extremely down due to the growing wall between Louise and him, reacted to the pestering voice. He stood up and grabbed Malicorne’s collar.

He didn’t use much force, but whispered in a threatening voice, “Hey fatty, what'd you say?”

Terrified, Malicorne dropped his act and shook his head repeatedly, “A-Ah, nothing, I didn’t mean it!”

“I didn’t mean it, sir.”

“Y-yes, I didn’t mean it, sir!”

“Then go get a chair. Let’s eat happily together.”

Malicorne rushed off to get a chair. With an unconcerned look, Louise was waiting for the prayer time before the meal. *I wonder what happened. What change of heart is this? Why is she being so nice? Surely there’s a reason. Nope,* he thought, *The trip to Albion changed Louise.*

It must be … after seeing people injured and killed, these warm feelings must have started to blossom within her. This reminded Saito of the story about General Tokugawa Tsunayoshi of the Edo period and his command to be compassionate towards animals. The dog shogun took pity on a stray dog, and punished those who bullied it.

So that’s it.

The command to be compassionate towards animals has been set upon Tristain.

The law setter: Louise Françoise le Blanc de la Vallière.

The object: familiars, as well as dogs- myself in other words.

Saito stopped his imagination and looked at Louise warmly.

You’ve become nicer haven’t you Louise, more like a girl. You’re dazzling like this. Being so nice to someone like me… You’re growing up like a girl.

I’ll watch over you carefully - I won’t make a move on you ever again. Until I return to Earth, I will protect you. Even if you don’t like me, I’m happy that you’re being so nice to me.

Her radiance mixing in with his sadness and despair, Saito smiled warmly. Louise noticed Saito watching her intently and blushed, “W-Why are you looking at me like that?”

Noticing the vile way he was looking at her, Saito averted his eyes and tightened his hands into fists on his knees. *Listen carefully, Saito. Nobles aren’t for dogs*

like you. Compared to Louise, who's so beautiful and pure, you are just a homely mole. There's no way a mole can look at such a cute girl in a decent way.

The thoughts repeated in his mind. Saito's poignancy quickly consumed him, like a bottomless swamp. Saito obediently whispered, "Sorry for being so repulsive."

Louise quickly turned the other way.

Ugh, she must think I'm weird. The master thinks this mole is weird.

Saito stared at the food on the plate with a dull face. It was a luxurious meal, but the colors of it seemed to fade before his eyes.

The usual prayer proceeded and breakfast began. Saito quietly ate his food. It was delicious, but he was so miserable he could not taste it.

When Louise entered the classroom, she was quickly surrounded by her classmates. There were rumours that she had been on a dangerous journey and had accomplished great feats during her absence.

The truth was that a number of students were watching the spectacle where the leader of the Magic Defence Squad had departed. It wasn't a quiet scene. They were all eager to know what happened and they would have asked her during breakfast too if it weren't for the teachers.

Kirche and Tabitha were already seated. They, too, were surrounded by a group of students.

"Hey, when you and Louise were absent from class, where did you all go?" asked Montmorency, grasping her arm.

Glancing at her, Kirche elegantly started redoing her make-up and Tabitha quietly sat while reading her book. Tabitha didn't talk much. As for Kirche, although she usually was in the mood to talk, today she didn't feel like telling her classmates about their secret journey.

No matter how hard their classmates pushed and pulled, they couldn’t extract anything out of the two, so they switched their target to Guiche and Louise, who had just appeared.

Guiche, who liked being surrounded and fussed over, got carried away as expected. “You want to ask me, right? You want to know the secrets I know? Ahaha, what a troubled little rabbit!”

Louise broke through the crowd of people and smacked Guiche over the head. “What do you think you’re doing?! You’ll be hated by the Princess if you say anything, Guiche.”

With a single reference to Henrietta, Guiche became silent at once. Their classmates grew even more suspicious upon seeing this. They surrounded Louise and started pestering her.

“Louise! Louise! What actually happened?”

“Nothing at all. Osman just sent me to the palace on an errand, that’s all. Right Guiche, Kirche, Tabitha?”

Kirche smiled mysteriously while blowing on her polished nails. Guiche nodded. Tabitha read her book. Since no one was willing to speak, their classmates returned to their seats. Like a group of sore losers, they started to talk about Louise angrily.

“Heh, it’s probably nothing important anyway.”

“Yeah, it’s Louise the Zero we’re talking about here. I can’t imagine what great feat she could possibly accomplish when she can’t even use magic.”

“Catching Fouquet was only a fluke. Her familiar just accidentally drew out the power of the Staff of Destruction,” Montmorency said irritatingly, waving her curly hair.

Louise bit her lip, wearing an annoyed expression on her face whilst keeping silent. Saito was shocked. *How dare this curly-haired woman insult my Louise? Well, not ‘my’ Louise I guess. A mole like me could never have Louise.* Oh well. Even if it’s a girl, Saito would do what he had to do.

Just as Montmorency walked off with a satisfied look on her face, Saito casually stuck his foot out. Montmorency didn't notice and tripped over Saito's foot.

"Aaah!"

Montmorency, sporting a red nose from falling face-first to the ground, angrily shouted at Saito.

"What are you doing? I'm a noble! How dare a commoner like you trip me!"

Louise said from the side, "It was you who wasn't paying attention."

"What? Siding with the commoner now, Louise the Zero?!"

"Saito may be a commoner, but he's also my familiar, Montmorency the Flood. Insult him and you insult me; it's the same thing. Have anything to say to that?"

Montmorency left, muttering angrily to herself. To Saito, Louise, who had just stuck up for him, was suddenly dazzling and he found himself staring at her warmly. Louise felt his gaze and turned her face aside, blushing, "W-What are you looking at?"

Saito, yet again realizing his repulsive stare, apologized to Louise. This homely mole has done it again.

"S-Sorry."

Louise noticed that Saito had been acting strange since morning. He was more reserved than usual. *What more do you want, I'm being so nice to you.*

Louise was about to say something to Saito about it, but then, Mr. Colbert entered the classroom, so she sat back down. Class started.

"Well, everyone," Mr. Colbert patted his bald head slightly. Until yesterday, he had been frightened that Fouquet the Crumbling Dirt had broken out of prison. Immediately, the initial conclusion was that there was a traitor in the castle. He thought that it was a serious affair for Tristain.

This morning however, Osman summoned him, telling him that it was "alright already" and he returned to his normal self. Besides, things like politics did not

interest him much.

What he did have interest in was knowledge, history and … research. That's why he liked lessons. He could freely state the results of his research. And so, on a joyful note, he showed the class something strange that he placed on the desk.

"Mr. Colbert, what's that?" one student asked.

It really was a strange looking machine. It was composed of a long metallic tube with a metallic pipe stretching out of it. A pair of bellows were connected to the pipe and a crank was attached to the head of the cylinder. The crank was connected to a wheel on the side of the cylinder. Finally, gears were attached to the wheel and the box.

Staring at the equipment, the students were all wondering what sort of lesson would follow. Clearing his throat, he began his lecture, "Firstly, who can tell me the main characteristics of the fire branch of magic?"

The class turned to Kirche. If you were talking about the fire branch of magic in Halkeginia, then you would be referencing Germanian nobles. Among them, the Zerbsts were a famous family. As her nickname, Ardent, indicated, she was adept at fire magic.

Even though class had started, Kirche still continued to polish her nails. Without taking her eyes off the nail file, she replied languidly, "Passion and destruction."

"That's right!" said Mr. Colbert, himself a triangular fire mage whose nickname was 'Flame Serpent'.

"However, besides passion, only being able to destroy is a bit lonely, I think. It depends on the usage, everyone. Depending on how you use it, you can actually do some really fun things. Fire is not only for destruction, Miss Zerbst. A battlefield is not the only place where you will see it."

"There's no use in trying to explain fire magic to Tristain nobles," Kirche said, filled with confidence. Mr. Colbert was not agitated by her arrogance, but smiled instead.

"But, what's that strange thing you have there?" Kirche asked with a blank look, pointing at the equipment on the desk.

“Hehe. So you finally asked. This is something I invented. It works using oil and fire magic.” The students gaped, staring at the mechanism intently. The mechanism seemed somewhat familiar to Saito, as if he had seen it somewhere before. Being a curious person, he too remained silent and watched intently.

Mr. Colbert continued, “First, we vaporize the oil in the bellows.” He stepped repeatedly on the bellows with his foot. “And then, the vaporized oil will go into this cylindrical tube.”

With a cautious look, Colbert stuck his wand inside a small hole he had opened. He recited an incantation. The sound of a blazing fire could suddenly be heard, and as the fire ignited the vaporized oil, the sounds changed into that of explosions.

“Watch carefully everyone! Inside the metallic tube, the power from the explosions are moving the piston up and down!”

The crank attached to the top of the cylinder started to move and the wheel along with it. The spinning wheel opened the door on the box. The gears began moving and a snake puppet came out from inside.

“The power is transferred to the crank which spins the wheel! Look! The snake then comes out to greet us! How interesting!”

The students watched it unenthusiastically. The only one interested seemed to be Saito.

“And then? What’s so special about that?”

Mr. Colbert was sad at the fact that the invention he took so much pride in had been totally chastised. Clearing his throat, he began to explain, “In this example, only a snake showed up, but say for instance this mechanism was placed on a carriage. Then, the carriage could move even without horses! It would also work on the side of a boat by turning a water wheel. Then there wouldn’t be any need for sails!”

“You could just use magic in those cases. There’s no need to use such a weird mechanism.” After one student said that, the others started to nod in agreement.

“Everybody, listen carefully! If it is improved upon, this could run machines

even without magic! I relied on my fire magic to ignite it, but say flint was used and a way to ignite it every so often was found…" Colbert was obviously getting excited, talking on and on, while the students were all wondering what was so special about it. The only one who seemed to understand the greatness of his invention seemed to be Saito.

"Mr Colbert, that's great! That's an engine!" Saito called up while standing all of a sudden. The whole class turned to him.

"Engine?" Mr. Colbert looked at Saito with a blank look.

"Yes, an engine. It's used in my world for functions you just mentioned."

"I can tell you're a perceptive person. You're Miss Vallière's familiar, yes?"

The fact that he was the legendary familiar Gandálfr who had runes on the back of his hand suddenly came back to Mr. Colbert. He had forgotten since Osman had said to leave it to him … but due to his enthusiasm he started to hold an interest in Saito.

"Where were you born?" he asked eagerly.

Louise tugged at Saito's parka slightly and glared at him. "Don't say anything unnecessary, we'll look suspicious."

Agreeing, Saito sat back down.

"Hmm? Where were you born?" Colbert approached Saito with a bright expression. Louise answered for him.

"Mr Colbert, he's uh… from Rub' al Khali in the East.

Mr. Colbert was taken aback. "What?! Past the frightening lands of the elves? Wait, he was summoned wasn't he… so he didn't have to go through those lands… I see. I hear that the lands the Elves govern in the East have advanced technology. So you were born there… I see," he nodded in comprehension.

Saito turned to Louise.

"What?"

“Just play along,” said Louise, stepping on his foot.

“A, Ah yes. I’m from um… Rub'.”

Mr. Colbert nodded again and returned to the mechanism. Standing on the platform once more he looked around the classroom.

“Alright then, who would like to try operating the mechanism? It’s very simple! Just open the hole in the cylinder, put your wand in and recite the ‘ignite’ spell repeatedly. The timing is a bit tricky but once you get used to it, it will be easy like this,” Mr. Colbert stepped on the bellows with his foot and operated the mechanism once more. The explosive sounds echoed throughout the classroom while the crank and gears moved, followed by the snake showing its face.

“And the joyful snake greets us!”

No one raised their hand. Mr. Colbert tried to get the students interested in his mechanism by saying “joyful snake”, but it didn’t quite work. Disappointed, Colbert drooped his shoulders.

Montmorency, suddenly pointed at Louise, “Louise, you try it!”

Mr. Colbert’s face lit up, “Miss Vallière! You have an interest in the mechanism?”

“Catching Fouquet the Crumbling Dirt and journeying to dangerous places, surely you won’t have trouble with something like this right?”

Louise realized Montmorency was trying to embarrass her by making her fail.

It seemed Montmorency didn’t like Louise getting all the attention, such as accomplishing great feats and being the star at balls. Her jealousy was deep and the fact that she was a show off suddenly came back to Louise.

Montmorency continued provoking Louise, “Hey, do it Louise. Louise the Zero.”

Something in Louise cracked. She just couldn’t keep quiet when Montmorency called her Zero. Louise silently stood up and approached the platform.

Seeing Louise in this state, Saito glared at Montmorency, “Hey Monmon.”

“It’s Montmorency for God’s sake!”

“Don’t provoke Louise! It’ll end up as an explosion!” said Saito, without thinking.

Louise shifted her eyes at Saito's comment. The front row students hid behind their chairs.

Hearing the comment, Mr. Colbert remembered Louise’s skill and the origin of her nickname. Trying to desperately change her mind, he began to persuade her in a flustered manner.

“Ah, Miss Vallière. Er, you can do it another time, alright?”

“I have been insulted by Montmorency the Flood,” said Louise in a cold voice. Her reddish brown pupils were filled with rage.

“I shall discipline Miss Montmorency. So, er, could you please withdraw your wand? I do not doubt your skill, but magic doesn’t always succeed. I mean, ‘a dragon can also die from fire’, after all.”

Louise looked sharply at Colbert, “Please let me do it. I do not always fail. Occasionally, I succeed.”

“There are times when I, occasionally, succeed,” said Louise, as though the words were meant for herself, her voice trembling. Saito knew there was no stopping Louise now. When Louise was extremely irked, her voice would start to shake.

Mr. Colbert looked up at the ceiling and sighed.

Louise copied Mr. Colbert actions and stepped on the bellows. The vaporized oil was sent to the cylinder. She took a deep breath and stuck her wand inside the cylinder.

“Miss Vallière, uhh …” whispered Mr. Colbert as if he was praying.

With a voice as clear as a bell, she started to recite the spell incantation.

The whole class froze.

As expected, the mechanism exploded. Louise and Mr. Colbert were sent flying towards the black board while the class screamed. The explosion splattered the burning oil throughout the room. The students ran around chaotically, avoiding the flames.

As the chair and table were burning, Louise stood up slowly. It was a pitiful sight. Her clothes were scorched and her clear complexion was covered in soot. Totally ignoring the chaos within the classroom, she grabbed Mr. Colbert's arm and whispered, "Mr. Colbert. That machine of yours breaks quite easily."

Mr Colbert didn't reply, feeling faint headed. The students replied for him, "It's you who broke it! You Zero! Louise the Zero!"

"Never mind that, there's a fire! Someone put it out!"

Montmorency stood up and recited a spell. It was the water spell 'Water Shield'. The barrier of water extinguished the fire and the students applauded Montmorency. Montmorency, as if she had triumphed, said to Louise, "I wonder if that was unnecessary. After all, you're such a skilled mage and that was such a weak fire."

Angry, Louise bit her lip.

It was night by the time the classroom was cleaned up. Tidying up the chairs and desks and wiping the floor was a big task. Exhausted, Louise and Saito returned to their room. Saito collapsed on his haystack. Louise sat down on her bed. It was almost time for bed. Out of habit, Saito went to the closet to get Louise's clothes. Louise, however, suddenly stood up.

"W-What are you doing?"

Louise blushed and did not reply. Her hands gripped the sheets and she started hanging them from her bedposts. The sheets acted as a curtain and hid her bed. Watching Saito out of the corner of her eyes, she went to the closet, found her

clothes, and returned to bed. Saito could hear the ruffling of clothes as she changed behind the curtain. Depressed, Saito returned to his haystack.

She doesn't want to be seen by someone like me. Even if I see you, I won't do anything strange. I won't even look anymore. I'm not the hungry wolf you think I am … I'm a mole. Well, you were kissed by a mole, but that was when I got carried away, I made a mistake. I won't ever do it again, Louise. I'll watch over you properly. This homely mole will watch over you from this haystack.

Saito endlessly tortured himself with these thoughts. The curtain was taken down. Wearing a negligee, Louise was bathed in moonlight, her hair flowing smoothly. The brilliant moonlight accentuated her divine beauty. After combing her hair with her hands, she lay down and switched off the lamp on her bedside table with a flick of her wand. It was a magic lamp that would switch off at the signal of its master. It wasn't exactly special, but it seemed like something expensive. With the moonlight bathing the room, the atmosphere felt ethereal.

Just as Saito was about to fall asleep, Louise sat up and called out, "Hey, Saito."

"Yes?"

"Always sleeping on the floor is a bit extreme …you can, er, sleep on the bed if you want."

Saito's body stiffened, "W-What?"

"Don't get the wrong idea! I'll hit you if you do anything strange."

Saito was overwhelmed. ''Ah, Louise you really are kind, aren't you. It's like you've changed completely. That harsh experience really did change you… You're even becoming kind to a disgusting mole like me.'' With every inch closer to the bed, his pulse seemed to double. Louise faced the window, wrapped up in the blanket on the edge of the bed.

"Is it… ok? Even for me? A mole?"

"Yes, it's ok, don't make me say the same thing. What do you mean a mole?"

Saito slipped into the bed and covered himself with the blanket.

“Sorry.”

He had to apologize for getting carried away and kissing her. He felt he had to. Saito whispered, “Sorry … for kissing you like that.”

Louise didn’t reply.

Saito thought she was sleeping, but it didn’t sound like it. Saito continued, “I've … decided before then that I would protect you as I had promised Prince Wales.”

“Not only from enemies, but also from my own desires as well. I can’t say I’ve done a good job of protecting you so far, so, I’m sorry.” said Saito, who was now clearly voicing his thoughts.

Louise replied in a small voice, ”It’s fine, don’t worry about it.”

Saito grasped the blanket and whispered, “I won’t do it again.”

“Of course.” replied Louise.

She started to talk, as if determined to tell Saito something.

“...but, I too have to apologize. Sorry, for just summoning you.”

“That’s ok. It’s not good, but it’s alright.”

“I’ll find a way for you to return home. I don’t know how, but I will. I've never heard of another world before.”

“Thanks,” Saito felt relieved.

Squirming a bit, Louise asked Saito, “Your world … there aren’t any mages there right?”

“Nope.”

“There’s only one moon?”

“Only one.”

“That’s weird.”

“No it’s not, it’s this world that’s weird, mages and stuff.”

“What were you doing in that world?”

“I was a high school student.”

“High school student?”

“Well it’s not much different from being a student here, I guess. Studying is kind of your job.”

“What do people do when they grow up?”

Louise started to bombard Saito with questions. While wondering why, Saito replied, “Hmm, a company employee perhaps, that’s the most common.”

“What’s a company employee?”

He became slightly irritated, but replied, “You work and you earn money.”

“I don’t really understand … but is that what you want to become?”

Saito remained silent. He hadn’t thought of what he wanted to do in the future. He spent his days doing what he liked. His future was neither bright nor dark. Thinking this state of affairs would last forever, he just absentmindedly attended school. Saito was a bit troubled by his reply, “I dunno. I haven’t really thought about it.”

“Wardes said you were a legendary familiar. Those runes on the back of your hand are apparently the mark of Gandálfr.”

“I don’t really understand, but it seems that Gandálfr is meant to use the sword Derflinger.”

“I wonder if that’s true…”

“Well it has to be, I couldn’t use a sword like Derflinger normally.”

“Then, why can’t I use magic? You’re a legendary familiar, yet I’m Louise the Zero. Ugh.”

“I don’t know.”

Louise remained silent for a while. Then she spoke in a serious tone, “You know, I want to become a great mage. I don’t mean a very powerful mage. I just want to be able to cast spells properly. I don’t want to fail every spell I cast and not even know which branch of magic I’m good at.”

Saito remembered the class they had earlier. As usual, Louise had failed.

“Ever since I was small, I was told I was hopeless. My father and mother didn’t expect anything of me. I was always treated like an idiot, always called Zero … I really don’t have any skill. There isn’t a branch of magic that I’m good at. I’m even clumsy at reciting incantations. I get it. My teachers, mother and sisters have said it. When you recite an incantation for a spell in your branch of magic, something within your body responds and it circulates within your body. When that rhythm is at a climax, it means that the spell is completed. I have never felt that before.”

Louise’s voice became smaller, “But, I want to at least be able to do things like everyone else. Otherwise, I get the feeling I won’t be content with myself.”

Louise became silent once more. Saito did not know what to say to comfort her. Some time passed before Saito began to speak.

“Even if you can’t use magic … you’re normal. Not just normal … you’re cute. And you’ve been so kind recently as well. You have your own qualities. Even if you can’t use magic, you’re a great person…”

Ending his incoherent reply, Saito turned towards Louise. She had already fallen asleep. Her innocent face took his breath away. It seemed she had drifted off while Saito was thinking of his reply. Her pinkish blond hair mixed with the moonlight, shining brightly. Steady breathing could be heard from her small pink lips.

Looking at those lips, he wanted to press his lips against hers once more and, without even realizing it, he started to move his face forward. But, he stopped. *It's cowardly to kiss a girl who isn't even his lover while she is sleeping. I’m not your lover… but I will protect you. So don’t worry Louise.*

Smiling warmly at Louise, Saito closed his eyes. With Louise’s breathing as a

lullaby, Saito fell asleep.

Louise opened her eyes once Saito had fallen asleep. She knit her eyebrows and whispered, “I was even pretending to sleep”. Louise hugged her pillow, and bit her lips. It’s so different, she thought. When he was making a move on her, he did it rashly like an idiot and yet when he’s obedient, he’s totally obedient.

I don’t understand. I don’t understand what he’s thinking at all. Louise rested her hands on her chest. When Saito was next to her, her chest really did throb. So these feelings really are true?

She wanted to return the favour to Saito, who had been so kind and had saved her so many times… But that wasn't the only thing. It was the first time she had felt these feelings for someone of the opposite sex and she didn't know what to do. She didn't allow Saito to help her change because of this. Once she recognized these feelings, she became embarrassed at the mere thought of him looking at her skin. She didn't want him to see her face after she had just woken up.

When did I start having these feelings for Saito? Probably since that time, Louise thought. Just when she was about to be killed by Fouquet's golem, she was hugged by Saito. Her heart throbbed. Despite the fact that she was about to die, her heart beat loudly. There was also the time when Wardes was about to kill her. Saito jumped in and saved her. But the time her heart beat the fastest was when they were riding on the dragon and he had kissed her. After that, she couldn't look at Saito's face.

I wonder what Saito thinks of me? An unpleasant girl? A selfish and mean master? Or perhaps he likes me? Well, he kissed me, so he must like me. Or could it be that he's the same as Guiche and just likes women? I wonder which one. I want to know. Anyhow, why didn't he do anything when I was just sleeping beside him, Louise thought.

''Of course, if he did anything now I'd kick him in the crotch.''

''But…but…'' Louise tapped Saito's pillow. He didn't wake up. She looked around restlessly. Other than the moon, nothing was looking at her. She moved towards Saito's face. Her pulse started to quicken. She pressed her lips upon his softly, only for about two seconds. It was the kind of kiss that the person wasn't even aware had taken place.

Saito turned over.

Louise panicked slightly and drew away from his face, sinking into the blanket, hugging her pillow.

What am I doing? To my familiar as well. I'm such an idiot.

She looked at Saito's face. He was kind of cool: coming from another world, being obedient at times, yet carried away at other times for absolutely no reason. *The legendary familiar … I wonder if I really do like him? Is this what they call*

love?

While she repeated her thoughts, she traced her lips with her fingers. The heat was like iron against her lips. *How can I find the answer to this question?*

"I don’t want to be left not knowing the answer…" whispered Louise as she closed her eyes.

Chapter Three: The Founder's Prayer Book

Sir Osmond was staring at the book the palace had delivered and absent-mindedly twirled his beard. The cover, sheathed in old leather, was so worn out that it looked like it would tear from a single touch. The book's pages had a tawny color to them.

Hmm...

While muttering, Sir Osmond turned a page. Nothing was written on it. There were about three hundred pages in the book and they were all blank.

"‘The Founder's Prayer Book’ has always been handed down through the Tristain royal family…"

Six thousand years ago, Founder Brimir offered a prayer to God and wrote down his spells using magical runes as letters.

“Isn't this a fake?”

Sir Osmond looked suspiciously at the book. Fakes… they're all too common with ‘legendary’ artifacts. Apparently, only one ‘Founder's Prayer Book’ exists in the world. Rich nobles, temple priests, and royal families of all countries... everybody claims to have the real ‘Founder's Prayer Book’. But regardless of each one's authenticity, all of them were collected in the library as genuine articles.

“But if it is a fake, it's an awful one. All of the characters are gone.”

Sir Osmond had seen the‘Founder's Prayer Book’ several times before in numerous occasions. The runes always seemed to leap from the pages. However, he never saw a book with no characters like this one. Could it be genuine?

At that moment he heard someone knocking. *I should hire a secretary* Sir Osmond thought as he invited the guest into the room.

“It’s not locked. Please, come in.”

The door opened and a slender girl stepped in. She had pink-blonde hair and big, reddish-brown eyes. It was Louise.

“I heard you called for me, so…” Louise said.

Sir Osmond stood up and spread his hands, welcoming the petite visitor.

He wanted to thank Louise for her efforts from the other day,

“Oh, Miss Vallière. Have you rested after the tiresome journey? Your great efforts ensured the alliance's safety and prevented a crisis in Tristain.”

Sir Osmond said in a soft voice.

“And, next month in Germania, there will finally be a wedding ceremony held for the princess and Germania’s emperor. It's all thanks to you. Be proud of yourself.”

After hearing this, Louise's spirit momentarily faltered. Her childhood friend Henrietta was going to be used as a political tool and marry Germania’s emperor without love. Even though there was no other solution for the alliance, Louise chest tightened whenever she recalled the sad smile on Henrietta’s lips.

Louise silently bowed. Sir Osmond became silent for a while and watched Louise. Then, remembering that he had the‘Founder's Prayer Book’ in his hands, he held it out for Louise.

“What's this?”

Louise looked at the book with suspicion.

“The Founder's Prayer Book.”

“The Founder's Prayer Book? This?”

It was given to the royal family. And it's a legendary book. But why does Sir

Osmond have it?

“According to tradition in Tristain’s royal family, when a royal family member is wed, one aristocrat is chosen to take the role of the bridesmaid. Following the imperial edict, the selected bridesmaid is traditionally given the ‘Founder’s Prayer Book'.”

“Uh huh.”

Louise, who wasn’t aware of such detailed palace etiquette, replied blankly.

“And the princess has chosen Miss Vallière to be that bridesmaid.”

“The princess?”

“That's right. The shrine maiden must also come up with a written edict when receiving the‘Founder’s Prayer Book’”

"A...ah! I must think of an edict?"

“Indeed. Of course, there is still certain palace etiquette that you need to learn… traditions can be rather bothersome. However, Miss Vallière, the princess is looking forward to it. This is a great honor. So follow the palace regulations and write the edict, because something like this happens only once in a lifetime.”

Henrietta, my childhood friend, chose me to be her bridesmaid. Louise firmly looked up.

“I understand. I will obey respectfully.”

Louise accepted the ‘Founder’s Prayer Book’ from Sir Osmond’s hands.

Sir Osmond smiled, looking at Louise.

“You are willing to undertake it. Good, good. The Princess will be pleased.”

That evening, Saito was preparing a bath. Certainly, Tristain Magic Academy

had a bathhouse. It was a Roman style bathhouse lined with marble. It had a huge swimming pool filled with perfume mixed in hot water, and it was said to feel quite heavenly. Of course, Saito could not enter; only nobles were allowed to use it.

The commoners' bathhouse, compared to the nobles' bathhouse, was rather shabby. The joint bathhouse for commoners looked like a hovel. It was placed on stones with fire burning underneath, the strong smell of sweat and the tightly pressed bodies only made one sweat more.

One day in that bathhouse was enough to make Saito disgusted. Saito, who was raised in Japan, set up a bath using a kettle filled to the brim with hot water. The sauna was just too unsatisfying.

Bothered, Saito asked Marteau, the head chef, for a big old kettle. He burned firewood below the kettle to heat the water, placed the wooden lid at the bottom of the kettle for him to stand on and voila! A hot water bath was created.

Saito made his personal bath in the Vestri Courtyard’s nook. It was convenient since people did not come often to this courtyard.

The day was coming to an end and the two moons appeared, shining faintly. Once the water was hot enough, Saito quickly threw off his clothes and sank into the big kettle.

“Aah... the water is nice and hot.”

He put a towel on his head and started humming a melody.

Derflinger, who was leaning against the wall of the kettle, called out to Saito:

“Does it feel good?”

“Yeah.”

“By the way, partner, why didn’t you take advantage of the young mistress a while ago?"

Saito threw Derflinger a tepid glance.

“Don’t look at me like that. It feels bad, partner.”

“Hey, legendary sword.”

“Indeed I am a legendary sword. What is it?”

“During the past six thousand years, did you find someone important to you to protect?”

Derflinger shook lightly.

“I do not protect. It is the one that holds me that protects.”

“You poor thing…” Saito said from the bottom of his heart in a sympathetic voice.

“Poor, you say? On the contrary, it is quite comfortable.”

“Is that so? By the way, what things do you remember about this ‘Gandálfr’? How great was he, and what kind of things did he do?” Saito, showing his inborn curiosity, asked Derflinger.

“I forgot.”

“Huh.”

“It was a long time ago. Besides, partner, someone is coming.”

A shadow appeared in the moonlight.

“Who is it?”

Saito’s call startled the shadow. It dropped something that it was carrying with a clatter. Under the moonlight, one could hear the sound of a breaking pot.

“Waaah, it broke… I'll be scolded again… sniff”

From that voice, Saito was able to recognize the person hidden in the darkness.

“Siesta?!”

Illuminated by the moonlight, the figure of a housemaid working in the Alviss Dining Hall - Siesta - appeared. She had just finished her work and, although she was still wearing her usual maid clothes, the kachusha covering her head was now gone. Her loose shoulder-length black hair shone glossily in the moonlight.

Siesta squatted down to pick up the pot that she had dropped earlier.

“W-what are you doing here?”

Saito’s call made Siesta turn around.

“Uhmmm... today I was able to get some really tasty goods and I wanted Saito to try it! I would have given it to you in the kitchen, but you didn’t come today! Waah!” Siesta said in panic.

Indeed, there was a tray lying next to Siesta, an overturned teapot, and some cups. Surprised by the sudden call, it seemed like Siesta had dropped one cup.

“A treat?” Saito asked, still submerged in the bath.

Suddenly Siesta became aware of Saito’s nudity and, for a moment, averted her eyes in shame.

“That’s right. Some unusual goods came from the east town ‘Rub' al Khali’ today: Tea.”

“Tea?”

Tea was an extremely rare commodity. Siesta poured some from a teapot into a cup that was not broken and gave it to Saito.

“Thank you.”

Saito lifted it to his lips. The sweet aroma of tea tickled his nostrils. And when it was in his mouth, it tasted like Japanese green tea.

Saito suddenly felt overwhelmed with nostalgia. *Aah, Japan. Dear mother country.* In his big kettle bath, Saito spontaneously wiped the corners of his eyes.

“W-what’s the matter! Are you alright?”

Siesta bent over the edge of the kettle.

“N-no, I just felt nostalgic for a moment. I’m alright. Yeah.”

After saying that, Saito brought the cup back to his mouth. Though a tea and a bath made a strange combination, they both soaked Saito with longing.

“Do you miss it? That’s right, Saito-san comes from the east.”

Siesta flashed a shy smile.

“I... I probably feel that way. However, did you know that I was here?"

Saito’s words made Siesta blush.

“T-that’s, that’s. I’m just here because I saw you going this way with hot water and…”

“You peeped?”

Saito’s voice saying that was blank. Siesta hastily shook her head.

“N-no, I didn’t mean it that way!”

Flustered, Siesta tripped over the edge of the kettle and with a loud splash, fell into the kettle.

“Kyaaaaaaa!”

Siesta screamed, but her shriek was suppressed by the hot water inside the iron kettle.

“Are you alright?”

Saito asked in blank surprise.

“I-I’m alright… Wah, but I am soaked now…”

Siesta stuck her wet head out of the hot water.

The poor girl’s housemaid clothes were sodden. And when she became aware of

Saito’s naked state, a furious blush spread on her face.

Saito panicked.

“S-sorry! Even though the bath is on a stove, it is still possible to fall in!”

“N-no, I’m sorry!”

Although she was apologizing, Siesta didn’t try to get out of the bath. Saito then decided to take a defiant attitude as well. He pretended in a somewhat manly manner that it was not big deal she was not getting out.

At such times, he tried to act in a calm and collected manner. *Was it manly?* Saito thought so. Which meant that Saito was a fool as well.

“Ufufu”

Siesta laughed still soaking with her maid clothes inside the big kettle. Though it wasn’t a laughable situation, she still laughed.

“W-what’s wrong?”

Perhaps his size was a laughingstock? Though it was dark and no one could see below the surface of hot water, Saito suddenly felt insecure.

“Nothing, but, it feels good. Is this how you bathe in Saito-san’s country?"

Feeling relieved, Saito answered.

“That’s right. Though, it is unusual to get in while wearing clothes."

“Ara? Is that so? Yet, if you think about it, that must be true. Well then, I’ll take them off.”

“Yes?”

Pop-eyed Saito asked Siesta.

“What did you say just now?”

Siesta, who is usually hesitant and shy, for some reason became bold. Slightly

biting her lips she looked at Saito in a determined way.

“I said, I’ll take them off.”

“But Siesta? I am a man…”

Saito said dumbfounded.

“That’s alright. I know that Saito-san is not a person who would hurt me.”

Saito nodded, though he hadn’t heard a single word.

“No, oh my, don’t do such a thing…”

“But I also want to use this ‘Bath’ properly. It is nice.”

And, eh? Saito stared as Siesta rose from the hot water and started taking off her soaked clothes. Saito turned his eyes away in panic.

“S-stop it! Siesta! Wait a moment! This is awkward!"

However, Saito’s ‘Stop’ sounded weak, betraying his real thoughts.

“B-but I am dripping wet… The Chief would be mad if I return like this to the room. I think I should dry my clothes off on the fire first.”

Although she was usually obedient, Siesta could be really bold when she decided to.

The buttons of the blouse and the hook of the skirt were unfastened in a flash. It felt good taking off wet clothes.

Siesta took off her housemaid uniform and underwear and left them to dry on the firewood, close to the fire. After that, she stepped into the hot water again. Saito with the corner of his eyes watched the submerging Siesta’s legs. He had never seen Siesta’s bare legs, as they were always hidden behind the skirt. They were white and healthy. Aah, if only he could turn his face that way, he would be able to worship her entire body.

“Uwaa! It feels good! Sharing a bath this way, soaking in the hot water really does feel good! It feels like taking a noble’s bath. I am so jealous, but I can make

it myself, right? Saito you are really smart.”

“N-not really.”

Saito answered, his face still turned away. It felt as if the hot water suddenly turned hotter. Next to him was a naked girl. In that sort of situation, Saito felt dazed and almost fainted. Siesta said with a shy smile on her lips.

“Please don’t be so shy. I’m not shy as well. It is all right to turn this way. Look, my breasts are hidden behind my arms… besides it’s so dark that you cannot see through the water anyway, so stay calm.”

Saito, feeling half-confused, half-happy, turned around.

Siesta was sitting right before Saito, submerged in the hot water. Because it was dark, you couldn’t clearly see the body behind the surface of the water. He was somewhat relieved.

Yet, Saito took a deep breath.

In the darkness, Siesta's wet black hair was glittering fascinatingly.

From a close look one could see that Siesta was actually a very lovely girl. He hadn’t noticed until now, but she was different from Louise or Henrietta, she was like the charm of a lovely flower, freely blossoming in the field. Her big dark eyes, friendly nature and tiny nose were charming and pretty.

“Hey, Saito, what kind of place is your country?”

“My country?”

“Yes, please tell me about it.”

Siesta innocently bent forward listening. Ah, when bending forward so much one could see, ah, aah… Saito fell backwards in panic.

“W-well! There’s only one moon, there are no magicians, that’s why they use switches to turn the light off, and they fly in the sky with planes…”

Because Saito was so incoherent, Siesta puffed her cheeks.

“Stop it. One moon, no wizards, are you making fun of me? Don’t look down on me just because I’m a village girl.”

“I-I’m not making fun of you!”

Saito thought that even if he told her the truth it would only confuse her. After all, the only ones that knew at the moment that Saito was from a different world were Louise, Sir Osmond and Henrietta.

“Well then, tell me the truth.”

Siesta looked up into Saito’s eyes. Siesta’s black hair and dark eyes wistfully reminded Saito of a girl from Japan. Of course, the face was different from a Japanese. However, a simple, nostalgic feeling still shot through Saito, making him flurry.

“R-right… We have different eating habits.”

Saito started talking about the distant Japan. Starry eyed Siesta listened

attentively to his story.

Though it might have felt like a vapid talk, Siesta was eagerly catching every single word. And before they realized it, Saito and Siesta lost any track of time, as he told her about his hometown.

After some time passed, Siesta stood up covering her breasts. Saito hastily turned his eyes away. However, for one moment, he still saw Siesta's breasts through a gap of her arms, and felt his nose bleed. Without a word, a thin trickle rolled down. Holding his nose, Saito looked the other way, while Siesta put on her now dry clothes and bowed her head thanking him.

"Thank you. It was very fun. This bath was great, and Saito-san's story was amazing as well."

Siesta said gladly.

"Can I hear it again sometime?"

Saito nodded.

After that, Siesta cast her eyes down with a blush, and shyly fiddled with her fingers.

"Well, err? The talk and the bath were great, but you were the most amazing…"

"Siesta?"

"Could you…"

"W-what?!"

But Siesta ran away in tiny steps.

Such a thing happening with this girl from a foreign world felt like a joke to Saito, so he dazed off and snuggled in the big iron kettle.

After the bath, he returned to Louise’s room and found Louise doing something on the bed. Once she saw Saito, she hid a book in panic. It was an old, big book.

Why? Though, he didn’t worry so much about it since she was Louise. He might not have understood even if she told him about it. Besides Saito’s head was filled with the sight of Siesta’s body. What he saw through the gap of her hands was firmly imprinted in Saito’s mind.

Saito approached the laundry basket, while shaking off the worldly thoughts. He decided to start doing laundry right away. He planned on using the remaining bath’s hot water, so his fingers would not be cold.

However, the basket was empty.

“Louise, where’s the laundry?”

When Saito asked, Louise shook her head.

“Washed already.”

“You washed…”

And then Saito saw Louise. "Huh!?" He was shocked. Louise was wearing his nylon parka that he took off and left in the room before going to take a bath. Whenever Saito went to a public bath, he always took off that nylon parka and went there wearing only his T-shirt, because, right after stepping out of the bath, his body always felt too hot.

Louise was probably wearing it right over her underwear. Because the sleeves were too long and waist was too loose, it made it look like some weird dress.

“You, why are you wearing my best suit?!”

Hearing Saito, Louise buried her mouth behind his nylon parka. Louise, whose cheeks blushed for some reason, said.

“Because…after doing the laundry, I had nothing left to wear.”

“Nonsense! It’s full!”

Saito pointed to the closet. There were a lot of Louise’s clothes. Because Louise was a noble, she had many expensive dresses to choose from.

“Still, I wanted to try something else on.”

Louise, sitting straight on the bed, said in a sulky tone.

“Couldn’t you wear these casual clothes?”

Saito took a plain dress in his hands.

“I don’t want to wear something like that!”

“But these are my only clothes. Return them.”

However, Louise didn't try to take it off. On the contrary, she rolled sheets around her fingers.

“Well it is light and fits nicely. What is it made of?”

Indeed. Saito had to agree that it really fitted her rather nicely. Reluctantly, he decided to give up. In the room it was not cold, even if wearing only a single T-shirt.

“Nylon.”

“Nailon?”

“That’s a fabric from my world. It is made from oil.”

“Oili?”

“The plankton that is collected at the bottom of the sea is stored for years, and later becomes oil.”

“Pulankuton?”

Louise stared blankly at him, she looked like a child parroting Saito’s words. Her expression was unreadable as half of her face was hidden behind Saito’s parka. For a moment Saito thought that this Louise looked irresistibly cute.

Furthermore, Louise even washed for him. It was impossible. Saito became scared somehow. Up 'till now, such actions were unimaginable for Louise.

Her cheeks were red. Saito was concerned so he decided to check to make sure she wasn't ill and had a fever.

Louise got startled when Saito approached her. She trembled, and… turned away.

Trying not to think how she must hate this, Saito grabbed Louise's shoulders and brought his forehead close to her. Louise's body stiffened but she didn't fight and quietly closed her eyes.

Just as I thought, her body condition must be really bad, Saito thought.

"It seems you have a fever."

When Saito pulled his forehead away from hers, Louise for some reason clenched her fist in tightly.

"What is it?" he asked, as Louise turned away from him and after some quiet rustling snuggled under the covers.

"Hey," Saito poked.

"Sleep," Louise answered and became silent again.

Wow, the fever must have eased up, Saito thought as he crawled into his pile of hay.

It was quiet for a moment and then a pillow flew at him.

"What the…?"

Saito asked.

"Bring back the pillow I just threw. Didn't I tell you to sleep in the bed from now on? Idiot."

Louise's sulky voice was heard.

He just couldn’t understand Louise’s mood, whether it was gentle or saucy as usual. *What does it matter?*, Saito thought as he slipped into Louise’s bed.

Though Louise was stirring restlessly in her futon, she soon quieted down.

Now he could think about how the day passed. Anyway, now his head was filled with Siesta. Siesta’s parting words were repeated in his head again.

Siesta certainly said “The most amazing was you…”.

Was it a confession? No, was she making fun? That’s not so. Am I popular? He wasn’t popular either. *The only one who showed interest was Kirche, but it was surely because I am convenient.*

Aah, but, Siesta was cute. Although Louise was cute, too, Siesta had a completely different allure.

Naive, simple, but honest. Unlike Kirche, she looked wonderful when taking her clothes off. Ghaah. T-that’s right. Nice. W-w-w-what. Damn. Beaten. I’m beaten.

For something that he hadn’t considered much until that moment, the impact was huge. Fascinated by the girl, Saito started to think of the ways to return back to earth.

He would find it surely, even if he hadn’t even the slightest clue how.

Then, feeling dizzy, he started thinking about Louise. He loved Louise. *But, because Louise is a noble she would never think of me that way. Besides I decided to protect her. This way I wouldn’t be that far from a lover.*

Still, to be lovers one would need to sway a girl… No, even Siesta might be only having fun. *Aah, I guess that’s how it is.*

Becoming sleepy while thinking about various things, Saito fell into the happy sensations of the dream world.

Outside Louise’s room window, Tabitha’s Sylphid was floating. On top of which, as usual, Kirche's and Tabitha’s figures were sitting. Tabitha was reading a book in the moonlight. Kirche was staring into Louise’s room from the crevice of the window.

Kirche snorted.

“After all, it is not looking good.”

She remembered the blush on Louise’s face as she cuddled with Saito on the back of the dragon, returning from Albion. Louise seemed to not be her usual self.

“Really, he doesn’t treat me seriously? Every time I approach him, I get rejected, it makes me worried against my will.”

Until now, there was no man who would refuse courting her. It was Kirche’s pride. Truly, Kirche felt forgotten like an inconvenient thing.

Kirche was irritated. A little while ago, he even bathed with a commoner's daughter. She was ignored and two-timed. Kirche’s pride was shaken. She was defeated by Louise, she was defeated by a commoner girl, this made her name of “Ardent” cry. She had to plunder Saito from Louise, by any means possible. Snatching away La Valliere’s lovers was an old Zerbst tradition.

“Yes, though plotting isn’t my specialty, I can still think of some strategy. Right, Tabitha?”

Tabitha shut a book, and pointed at Kirche.

“Jealousy.”

Kirche blushed. And then she shook her head at Tabitha’s words.

“D-don’t say that! I’m not jealous! I cannot feel jealousy! A game! This is just a game of love!”

Nevertheless Tabitha was not convinced. She repeated the same word again.

“Jealousy.”

Chapter Four: Love Triangle

Louise was seated in the east courtyard of the Academy of Magic, commonly known as Austri, and frantically knitting. The spring weather was beginning to change as summer approached, but Louise could still be seen in her spring clothing. Even during the summer, it was quite dry instead of humid.

Ten days had passed since they had returned from Albion. Today was a day off. Without even eating dessert, Louise came to the courtyard after her meal to knit. Sometimes, she would give her hands a rest and stare at the white pages of the Founder's Prayer book while thinking of a fitting edict for the Princess's ceremony.

Around her, students were enjoying themselves. There was a group playing with a ball. Using magic, they would throw the ball into a basket without using their hands and try to score the most points. Staring at the group of people, Louise sighed heavily and looked at what she had started to knit.

Looking at the scene from the side, it was much like a painting. Sitting there quietly, Louise looked like a beautiful girl. Louise's hobby was knitting. When she was small, her mother told her that if she had no talent for magic, she should at least have something she was good at, and so her mother had taught her how to knit.

But it seemed like the heavens did not give Louise any talent in knitting. Louise had planned to knit a sweater. However, regardless of how favorably she looked upon it, it looked more like a distorted muffler. Actually it was more like an object complicatedly entangled with wool. Louise stared bitterly at the object and let out another sigh.

The face of the maid working in the kitchen resurfaced in her mind. Louise knew that she was making food for Saito. Saito thought Louise didn't know, but she was not completely oblivious.

That girl can cook well. Kirche has good looks. What do I have? Harboring these thoughts, she decided to try her hobby, knitting, but it seems like it wasn't such a good choice.

Just as she was becoming slightly depressed from staring at the thing she was knitting, someone tapped her on the shoulder. It was Kirche. Panicking, Louise quickly hid what she was knitting with the Founder's Prayer Book.

"What are you doing Louise?"

Kirche gave her usual smile that seemed like she was looking down on her, and sat next to Louise.

"C-Can't you see? I'm reading."

"But, that book is blank, isn't it?"

"This book is a national treasure called the Founder's Prayer Book, you know?", said Louise

"Why do you have a national treasure?"

Louise explained to Kirche that at Henrietta's wedding ceremony, she was to read out the edict and how she was to use the Founder's Prayer Book, and so on.

"I see. I'm guessing that the Princess's wedding ceremony has something to do with the journey to Albion?"

Louise considered whether to answer Kirche truthfully or not, but since Kirche had acted as a decoy so that they could go on ahead, she nodded.

"We risked our lives so that the Princess's wedding could proceed smoothly? Not a very prestigious task… So, basically it has something to do with the alliance between Tristain and Germania announced the other day?"

Kirche was quite sharp.

"Don't say anything to anyone about it," said Louise with a slightly discouraged expression.

“Of course I won’t. I’m not Guiche you know. Our two native countries have become allies. We should try and get along from now on. Right, La Vallière?”

Kirche put her hands on Louise’s shoulders and smiled, almost purposefully.

“Did you hear? Albion’s new government proposed a non-aggression treaty. Cheers to the peace that we brought about.”

Louise replied half heartedly. For the sake of this peace, Henrietta had to marry a prince whom she didn’t even love. You could say that she had no choice, but it wasn’t something to be happy about.

“By the way, what were you knitting?”

Louise blushed deeply.

“I-I wasn’t knitting anything.”

“You were. It’s here, right?”

Kirche grabbed it from under the Founder’s Prayer Book.

“Hey, give it back!”

Louise was trying to take it back, but Kirche easily restrained her.

“What is it?” asked Kirche, dumbfounded while looking at the object.

“I-It’s a sweater.”

“A sweater? It looks more like a starfish. And a new species at that.”

“As if I would knit something like that!”

Louise finally snatched her knitting back, and looked downwards, embarrassed.

“Why are you knitting a sweater?”

“None of your business.”

“That’s ok. I know why anyway.”

Kirche put her hands on Louise’s shoulders again and approached her face.

“You were knitting it for your familiar weren’t you?”

“N-No! I would never do such a thing!” cried Louise, with a bright red face.

“You’re really easy to understand you know. You like him, right? Why?”, asked Kirche while looking into Louise’s eyes.

“I-I don’t like him. You're the one who likes him. That idiot doesn’t have any good qualities.”

“You know Louise, when you lie, you’re earlobes shake. Did you know that?”

Louise quickly grabbed her earlobes. Realizing that it was a lie, she returned her hands to her knees in a flustered manner.

“A-Anyhow, I won’t give him to you. He’s my familiar anyway.”

Kirche laughed and said, “It’s good that you want him for yourself. But I'm not the one you are worrying about, I think.”

“What do you mean?”

“Um… perhaps that kitchen maid?”

Louise’s eyes shifted.

“Heh, so I was right?”

“N-Not really…”

“If you go to your room now, you might see something interesting.”

Louise stood up quickly.

“I thought you didn’t like him?” Said Kirche in a playful tone.

“I only forgot something!” cried Louise while dashing off.

Saito was cleaning the room. He had to sweep the floor with a broom, and wipe the tables with a cloth. As Louise had recently been doing her own laundry as well as other things related to her appearance, Saito’s work was reduced to cleaning.

Cleaning was done very quickly. Louise’s room didn’t have many things in the first place, a small desk with drawers next to the closet, a table with a small vase containing a small plant, two chairs at a table, her bed and her bookshelf. As Louise was a fairly studious person, her bookshelf was lined with thick books.

He took one of the books down. It had characters that he had never seen before. *Well of course*, thought Saito as he put it back. But, why was he able to communicate with Louise then? Their language was different, and yet they were able to understand each other.

“What’s wrong partner?” asked Derflinger who was leaning against the wall of the room.

“Derf! Why do I understand what you’re saying?” asked Saito as he rushed to Derflinger.

“Well, if you didn’t understand, we would be in a bit of a pickle.”

“I come from a different world. And despite that I’m still able to understand your language. I don’t understand why!”

Saito remembered the person who was saved by Old Osman around thirty years ago. He was a person from his world. It seems like he and Osman had spoken with each other.

“How did you come to Halkeginia anyway partner?”

“I’m not sure myself… there was strange gate giving off this light…”

“Then I would think that the answer has something to do with that gate.” Said Derflinger, as though it were nothing important.

“What exactly was that gate then?”

“Dunno.”

Saito was a bit surprised.

“You’re a legendary sword and yet you don’t know anything. You should know a bit more since you’re legendary. Like, how to get me home…” Said Saito bitterly.

“I’m forgetful and not really interested anyway. Can’t rely on legends too much.”

Someone knocked on the door. Who could it be? If it was Louise, she wouldn’t knock. It’s probably Guiche or Kirche? “It’s not locked” Said Saito.

The door opened and Siesta popped her head in.

“S-Siesta.”

“Umm…”

She was in her usual maid uniform but looked slightly different. Her done up silky black hair dangled on her forehead and the freckles on her face emitted some charm. She was holding a large silver tray, filled with food.

“Um, you haven’t come to the kitchen recently…”

Saito nodded. As Louise let him eat whatever he wanted to, he visited the kitchen less often.

“So I was worried that you might be hungry…” Siesta said nervously.

Seeing her cute gestures, Saito’s heart started throbbing.

“T-Thanks. But, Louise lets me eat at the table now, so I haven’t really been hungry.”

“Really? I’ve been serving the teachers table recently so I didn’t notice. If I’m just being nuisance then…”

Siesta hung her head slightly.

“N-No, that’s not it at all! I’m really happy that you brought me food! I’m actually hungry right now!” Said Saito, even though he was full from eating at the Alviss dining hall just a while ago.

“Really?”

Siesta’s face brightened.

“Well, eat to your heart’s content.”

The small table was crammed full of food. Siesta sat next to Saito, smiling. Saito started to hate himself for eating so much before, but he couldn’t just let Siesta’s good intentions go to waste. Determined, he started to eat the food.

“Is it good?” asked Siesta.

“Yeah, it’s really good.”

He wasn’t lying, but it would have been even better if he had been hungry.

“Ehehe, eat all you want then.”

Siesta gazed at Saito who was eating in a hungry fashion.

“Oh sorry, my table manners…”

“N-No, it’s not that! It’s the opposite. I’m really happy that you like the food so much! The food and the cooks would be really happy!”

Blushing, she wiped her eyes with her hands. Siesta was cute like that. Saito couldn’t taste the flavor of the food anymore.

“I made that one,” said Siesta in a shy voice.

“Really?”

“Yeah. It was difficult to make it in the kitchen, but because you’re eating it, I’m glad I did it.”

Saito felt his heart tense up. *Siesta was thinking of me. Me of all people*. He lost himself within his thoughts. The atmosphere between them was very tense. Siesta suddenly said in a flustered tone, “S-Saito!”

“Y-Yes?”

“Umm.”

Siesta paused, as if trying to choose the right words.

“That talk, that we had before, was a lot of fun! Especially about that thing! Um, what was it called? Oh, the airplane!”

Saito nodded. Saito had talked to Siesta about his world and Japan in the bath. Siesta, coming from a village, didn’t know much about the world and was able to grasp what Saito had said as though they were things from another country.

“Ah, the airplane.”

“Yes! Being able to fly without magic must be wonderful! So even commoners like us, can fly freely in the sky like birds?”

“Isn’t there an airship?”

“It only hovers.”

“My village is actually a very nice place. It’s called Tarbes. It’s about three days from here by horse, in the direction of La Rochelle."

Saito listened intently while eating the food.

“It’s a very remote village and there’s nothing really special there but… it has a very spacious and beautiful field. During the spring, the spring flowers bloom and during the summer, the summer flowers bloom. It’s like a sea of flowers, as far as the eye can see, past the horizon. It should be very beautiful at the moment…” Said Siesta, eyes closed as if she were drowning in memories.

“I want to look at that sea of flowers just once in an airplane.”

“Sounds nice…”

“Oh, why didn’t I think of it before!” cried Siesta who suddenly grasped Saito’s hand.

Surprised, Saito nearly fell backwards.

“W-What?”

“Do you want to visit my village Saito?”

“Huh?”

“The princess is getting married right? There’s a special holiday for us. It’s been quite a long time since I’ve returned to the village… If it’s ok, please come. I want to show you that beautiful field of flowers. My village has this really nice way of cooking stew as well. It’s called "Yosenabe". It’s made from vegetables that people don’t usually use. I really want to let you taste it!”

“W-Why do you want me to come?”

“…You showed me that there’s a possibility,” said Siesta, nervously looking downwards.

“A possibility?”

“Yes. A possibility that even commoners can win against nobles. We live in fear of the nobles. Knowing that there are people who don't live like that makes me happy, as if their happiness was my happiness. Everyone in the kitchen believes that as well.”

“I want to show such a person to my hometown…” said Siesta.

“I-I see…”

Saito felt embarrassed. *I’m not great or anything. Occasionally I’m a legendary familiar, but that’s all. It’s not something to be praised over*.

“Of course, it’s not only that. I also want to show Saito the village… But, if I bring a man back suddenly, my family will be shocked. What should I do…”

Suddenly Siesta blushed deeply and whispered, “I can just say you’re my husband.”

“W-What?”

“If I say it’s because we’re getting married, they’ll be happy. My mother, father, brother and sister will all be happy.”

“Siesta?”

When Siesta glanced at Saito, who was staring at her dumbfounded, she shook her head.

“Sorry! That will be troublesome! I'm not sure if you'll even come! Haha!”

Embarrassed, Saito replied, “S-Siesta, you’re really bold sometimes. Like when we took a bath.”

Siesta blushed once again.

“I’m not being bold or anything.”

“Eh?”

“When I left home, my mother told me to not show anyone my body except to my chosen man.”

And with that, Siesta reached out and grasped Saito’s hand. Saito’s heart beat very loudly.

“I would have showed you if you simply asked.”

“Y-You’re joking…right?” Saito said, slack jawed.

“It wasn’t a joke. Even now…”

“W-W-What about now?”

Siesta looked straight into Saito’s face.

“Am I not attractive?”

“No, that’s not it at all.”

She was attractive. Too attractive.

“Really?”

Siesta continued looking into Saito. *Stop,* Saito thought, feeling as though he were being drawn into those black eyes.

“Then why didn’t you do anything when we were taking a bath?”

Siesta hid her eyes sadly.

Ah, don’t look like that, I’ll feel as though I’ve done something very bad.

“…I see, I’m not attractive. You have such a cute girl with you too…That La Vallière is a noble too. I’m just a village girl after all.” Said Siesta sadly, sighing.

“No, it’s not like that at all!”

“Saito.”

“You’re really attractive. I can guarantee it. You look stunning without clothes on.”

Normally those words would get him beaten up, but Siesta was glad.

She had been wondering whether to bring in the dessert or not. While Saito was rambling on, she closed her eyes and stood up. With a deep breath, she let her apron fall to the ground.

“Siesta!” Said Saito, shocked.

Siesta looked at him calmly. She was the kind of person who would do something well once she had decided to do it. She started to undo the buttons on her blouse one by one.

“Siesta! I don’t think it’s a good idea!” cried Saito, shaking his head.

“Don’t worry.”

Her blouse was half undone. Her well-sized cleavage captured Saito’s vision. Saito sprang at Siesta, but suddenly found himself shaking his head, crying, “W-Wait! Wait a moment! I have to think about something like this!”

“Kya!”

Siesta, whom Saito was grasping by the shoulders, lost her balance and fell onto Louise’s bed behind them, as if Saito had pushed her down.

“Sorry…”

Directly below Saito, Siesta lay with her blouse undone. Siesta put her hands on her chest and closed her eyes.

With superb timing, Louise had opened the door.

Within ten seconds, various things occurred.

One: Louise noticed that Siesta was pushed onto the bed by Saito. Two: Louise noticed that Sieta's blouse was undone. Three: Saito and Siesta stood up flustered. Six: Siesta buttoned up her blouse. Seven: Siesta dashed out of the room, facing away from Louise. Eight: Saito cried, “Wait Siesta!” Nine: Louise regained herself. Ten: Just as Saito was about to explain what had happened, he felt an intense pain as Louise high kicked him.

And with that, Saito was lying on the floor ten seconds after Louise opened the door.

Louise stepped on Saito’s head. Her voice and body were shaking.

“What exactly were you doing?”

“It’s not what it seems, Louise.”

“What were you doing on my bed?”

“It’s a long story, Siesta was bringing me food and…”

“A familiar doing something like that on his master’s bed. I can’t forgive you.”

“It’s not what it seems to be. I didn’t plan to do anything like-“

“That was the last straw.”

Tears started to fall from Louise’s eyes. Saito stood up and grasped Louise’s shoulders.

“Listen to me, it’s a misunderstanding!”

“Enough already.”

Louise glared at Saito.

“What?”

Saito couldn’t understand why Louise was so angry. She didn’t even like him. It definitely wasn’t something to cry about.

“Get out.”

“Um, just then, I didn’t mean for it to happen…”

“Get out! You’re fired!”

Saito was also starting to feel angry. *First you summon me, then you fire me? What am I supposed to do?*

“I’m fired?”

“Yes, you’re fired! Go die in a ditch somewhere!”

Those were harsh words, no matter what he had done. All that, just because he and Siesta were on her bed. *We weren't even doing anything. And I thought she was becoming nicer.*

"Ok, fine."

"I don't want to see your face ever again!"

Saito grabbed Derflinger and left the room without another word.

Alone in the room, Louise laid on her bed. She put the blanket over her head.

So mean, Louise thought.

It hasn't only been today. When I've been having lessons, he's been bringing that girl in and doing that and I didn't know. I won't forgive him.

Louise bit her lip. So his feelings for her were all lies. Tears ran down her cheek.

"I hate you... and you even kissed me."

She whispered the words repeatedly, as if they were meant for herself.

"… and you even kissed me."

While searching for Verdandi, Guiche spotted a tent in the corner of the Vestri courtyard. For some reason a huge kettle was placed next to it. Guiche wondered what the kettle and the tent were for.

It was a crude tent made from a stick and an old rag. There were remains of food, bones and skin from fruits, scattered around. It seemed like someone was living there. His beloved familiar came out of the tent while he was looking at the tent with his head tilted in wonder.

"Verdandi, so you're here!"

Guiche got on his knees and rubbed the large mole's cheeks. The mole happily

twitched its nose.

“Verdandi, what are you doing here?”

Someone crawled out of the tent and called out to the mole.

“Come here, mole. You and I, we're friends right?”

It was Saito. Disheveled and with a wine bottle in his hand, he was obviously drunk.

“What on earth are you doing?” asked Guiche, surprised.

Saito took a sip from the bottle and continued to call out to the mole, ignoring Guiche.

“Hey, come here. You’re the only friend I can trust.”

The large mole, as if it was troubled, looked at both Guiche and Saito.

“Verdandi, don’t go over there. Why is Verdandi your friend anyway?”

When Guiche asked that, Saito replied with a dead voice, lying on the ground.

“Because I’m a mole. A useless, poor, miserable mole.”

“I don’t know what happened, but don’t go thinking Verdandi is the same as you.”

Guiche peered inside the tent. Derflinger and, for some reason, Kirche’s salamander were in there.

“Kyuru kyuru.”

“What do you want?” Each of them said.

There was a pile of straw on the ground, and an upturned cup. That was all that was in the tent.

Guiche turned to Saito.

“So, you were driven out of Louise’s room?"

Lying on the floor, Saito nodded.

“And so you made this tent?”

Saito nodded again.

“Being lonely, you gathered people’s familiars and got drunk?”

Saito nodded vigorously. Guiche closed his eyes and nodded himself.

“Hmm. So you’re a good for nothing.”

“What else am I supposed to do? I’ve got no place to go. I don’t even have a clue how to get home. I can only drink.”

Saito gulped down the wine. Someone came rushing towards them. It was Siesta.

“Oh, I’m sorry I’m late. Here’s your lunch.”

It seemed like this maid from the kitchen was taking care of Saito.

“You’ve drank this much already?! I told you a bottle per day!” Siesta grabbed his hand while scolding him.

“Sorry…”

Saito sadly hung his head.

“You guys! I told you to keep an eye on how much he drank!”

“Kyuru kyuru.”

“My bad,” replied both the salamander and Derflinger in a sorry voice.

Siesta hastily cleaned up the mess around the tent and made Saito stand up.

“I’ll come again in the evening! Don’t drink too much!”

And then Siesta hurried away in the same fashion she had come.

Watching her leave, Guiche said with an artificial rose in his mouth, “Well, Louise would get angry if you were two timing.”

“I’m not two timing! I’m not even involved with anyone, neither Louise nor Siesta!”

He had kissed Louise while she was sleeping, but he didn’t say that. He would rather forget about it.

“Well whatever, but do you plan on living here?”

“Got a problem?”

“You’re ruining the school's beautiful scenery.”

“Shut up.”

“You’ll be told to get out if the teachers see you, you know?”

Saito gulped down his wine without another word, returning to the tent while hugging Guiche's mole. The mole looked desperately at Guiche.

“Hey, give me back my Verdandi!”

Meanwhile, Louise had been skipping class and staying in her bed, worrying endlessly. Three days had passed since she drove Saito out. She was thinking about the familiar she drove out.

He even kissed me, he even kissed me, he even kissed me, she thought endlessly. Having your pride hurt is really a terrible thing. She sadly glanced at the haystack that Saito used to use. She wanted to throw it out, but she couldn’t bring herself to do it.

Suddenly a knock came from the door. The first thought she had was that Saito had finally returned. Her sadness turned to joy, and within that joy she felt anger. *Why am I glad he’s back? I should not let him back in for coming back so late.*

The door opened. Louise jumped up and cried angrily.

“Idiot! Where have you…eh?”

It was Kirche who had come in. Brushing her flaming hair, she smiled at Louise.

“It’s only me, sorry.”

“What are you doing here?”

Louise went back to her bed. Kirche walked briskly to the bed and sat down. She threw away the blanket at once, revealing Louise curled up, sulking, in her negligee.

“You’ve been absent for three days now, so I came to see you.”

Kirche sighed heavily. Having a good conscience really did have its pains. She didn’t think Louise would drive him out of the room. She thought it would be good for the two to have a fight and separate from each other a bit, but she didn’t think Louise would go this far.

“So, what are you planning to do, now that you’ve driven your familiar out of your room?”

“None of your business.”

Kirche looked at Louise coldly. On her rosy cheeks, there were rivulet vestiges of tears. She had probably been crying for a while now.

“I knew you were foolishly arrogant and proud but I didn’t think you were this cold hearted. They were just eating together.”

“It wasn’t only just that, of all things they were on my bed…” Louise muttered.

“Were they in each other’s arms?”

Louise nodded. Kirche was quite shocked. To make a move on a girl who came to bring him food… Saito was pretty good.

“Well, seeing the guy you like with a girl on your own bed must be quite a shock.”

“I don’t like him! It’s just that they were on my bed…”

“That’s just an excuse. You drove him out because you like him, and you were angry with him.”

Kirche’s words had hit the mark, yet Louise disagreed and pouted her lips. “I can’t say I didn’t see it coming. It’s because you didn’t give him anything. It’s only natural he’d go flirt with another girl.”

Louise remained silent.

“La Vallière, you’re a strange girl you know. You’re angry at and crying over a guy who you won’t even kiss. You can’t win like that…” said Kirche in a bored tone while standing up.

“I’ll do something about Saito. I was looking forward to taking Saito away from you… but you hit him, and kicked him, and drove him out, I actually feel quite sorry for him. He’s not a toy you know.”

Louise bit her lips.

“A familiar is a mage’s partner. You fail as a mage because you can’t treat him properly. Well… you are zero after all.”

And with that, Kirche left. Louise didn’t reply. She crawled back onto her bed, full of sorrow and regret, and cried like she used to when she was small.

By the time Kirche had come to Saito’s tent, it was late at night already. Saito’s drunken voice could be heard within the crude tent. Flame’s “Kyuru kyuru” could also be heard in the tent. It must had come here to play when she had gone out to the streets.

Kirche opened the flap of the tent. The scene inside was disgusting. Guiche had his face buried in his mole, crying. Saito was hugging Flame, while grumbling with a wine bottle in his other hand.

“It’s just like you said! You're an idiot!” shouted Saito. It seems like he had drunk so much he couldn’t even articulate properly.

“I didn’t even do anything with that Katie. She held my hand, and I had only lightly kissed Montmorency! Despite that, I-!”

Guiche burst into tears. He was the type who cried when he drank. Kirche sighed. *Why do men have to be such idiots?* Derflinger noticed Kirche and informed Saito.

“Gentlemen, there’s a guest.”

“Guest?”

Saito looked groggily at Kirche.

“Kirche?”

“Looks fun, can I join?” Said Kirche, with a smile on her face.

Saito, who couldn’t possibly get any more drunk, was angered by the sight of a woman. He faced Kirche.

“Those large tits, if you show me them, you can join.”

Guiche started clapping his hands.

“I absolutely agree! In the name of Tristain’s nobles! I totally agree!”

Instead of replying, Kirche took out her wand and started reciting an incantation.

“Less drunk now?”

Saito and Guiche, who were both sitting straight now, nodded.

Everything around them was scorched. Even they were scorched. Kirche’s fire magic made Saito’s hair and Guiche’s nice shirt ragged looking. They had heard of water being a good trick to use, but they didn’t think fire would work just as well.

“Well then, get ready to leave.”

“Get ready to leave?”

Guiche and Saito looked at each other.

“Yes. Hey Saito.” Kirche called him by his name instead of darling.

“What?”

“Do you plan on living in a tent for the rest of your life?”

“No, but… I got driven out, and I haven’t found a way back home either…”

A way back home? Kirche and Guiche looked at each other. Saito suddenly shook his head.

“No, I mean, that, Rub' in the east!”

“Ah, you were born there weren’t you?”

Kirche nodded in comprehension. Saito sighed in relief.

While Kirche caressed Saito’s cheek, she said, “Don’t you want to become a noble?”

“A noble?”

Guiche was slightly taken aback.

“But Kirche, he’s a commoner. He can’t be a noble since he’s not a mage.”

“In Tristain that is. By law, commoners are strictly forbidden to purchase land or become nobles."

“Exactly.”

“But, in Germania it’s different. If you have money, even if you’re a commoner, you can buy land and become a noble, or buy the rights to a position and become a tax collector or a commander.

“And that’s why they call Germania uncivilized.” Said Guiche as though he were feeling sick.

“Uncivilized? People who are fussed over traditions and customs like ‘if you’re not a mage you can’t be a noble’, which make their country weak, have no right to talk. It’s the reason why Tristain has to ally with Germania to be able to oppose Albion.

Saito, who had been quietly listening, finally opened his mouth.

“Um, so Kirche. What you’re saying is that I should become a noble through money, in your country?”

“Exactly that.”

“I don’t have that kind of money. I’m penniless.”

“Then earn some.”

Kirche tapped Saito’s face with a bundle of parchment.

“What’s that?”

Guiche and Saito looked at the bundle. They seemed like maps.

“They’re treasure maps.”

“Treasure?!” Guiche and Saito said, surprised.

“Yes, we’re going to go treasure hunting and sell the treasure we find. Saito… you can do whatever you want then.”

Saito gulped. Kirche was embracing Saito, with her breasts pushing against him. Saito was shaking as though he was suffocating.

“When you become a noble… you can propose to me ok? I like guys like you. I don’t care if you’re a commoner or a noble. People who can overcome their difficulties and obtain things beyond people’s imagination… I like people like that.” Said Kirche, who was smiling seductively.

Guiche, who was looking at the map, whispered doubtingly, “No matter how I look at it, these maps seem a bit suspicious…”

“I got them from various places like magic shops, stalls, general stores…”

“It’s definitely something dodgy. I know of a few people who just sell ordinary maps, calling them treasure maps. There are even nobles who become bankrupt because of these hoaxes.”

“That attitude won’t do!” Said Kirche, with her hands clenched into tight fists.

“Most of them might be scrap, but there might be a real one hidden inside there.”

Gah…Guiche groaned while slapping his forehead.

“Saito, let’s go. Let’s go find treasure and abandon Louise… and then you’ll propose to me, ok?”

Abandoning Louise… that did have a nice ring to it. Nobles… they are always so proud, and they even forget about the people who have saved them before. Saito made up his mind.

“Alright, I’m in. Let’s go!”

Kirche hugged Saito tightly. Suddenly someone burst in.

“Nononono, you can’t do that!”

“Siesta?”

Before them was Siesta in her maid outfit.

“You can't marry, Saito!”

Siesta pulled on Saito.

“Don’t you wish the man you love to be happy?”

Siesta was taken aback by Kirche’s words and looked at Saito. She suddenly shook her head.

“Just because you’re a noble doesn’t necessarily mean you’re happy. You can stay at my village, and buy a vineyard with that money!”

“A vineyard?”

“In my village, there are a lot of good vineyards! We can make nice wine together! Its brand name could be Saito Siesta!”

Kirche and Siesta were both pulling on Saito. It was the first time in his life that he was fought over by girls. He blushed deeply. This probably wouldn’t happen ever again.

“As if you’d find treasure.” Guiche said in a bored tone.

“Guiche. If we find treasure you can give it to the Princess as a present and perhaps she will see you in a different light.”

Guiche stood up.

“Ladies and gentlemen, let’s go.”

“Take me along please!” Siesta called out. If she didn’t go along, there would be no doubt that Kirche would seduce Saito.

“No, you can’t. Commoners are just a burden.”

“Don’t treat me like an idiot! Even though I look like this, I’m…”

Siesta was shaking. Both her hands were clenched tightly together.

“Yes? Go on.”

“I can cook!”

“As if we didn’t know,” everyone said.

“But, but, meals are important right? While we’re searching for treasure, we’ll be camping right? We can’t just rely on the food we bring. I could make good food for everyone.”

Well she was right on that point. Guiche and Kirche were both nobles and couldn’t stand eating bad food.

“But you have work to do right? Are you just going to take a break?”

“The cook always lets me leave if I say I’m doing something for Saito.”

The head chef really liked Saito; he would probably do exactly as Siesta had said.

“Fine, do what you want. But I’ll tell you beforehand, the ruins, forests and caves we’re heading to are dangerous places. There are lots of monsters there.”

“I’ll be fine, Saito will protect me!”

And with that, Siesta grabbed Saito’s arm, leading him to fantasizing about Siesta’s naked breasts pressing against him.

Kirche nodded and turned to everyone.

“After the preparations are done we’re heading off!”

Chapter Five: The Arsenal and the Royal Family

The Albion air force's arsenal was located in the outskirts of its capital, Londinium, in the town of Rosyth. Before the Revolutionary War (which is what the Reconquista were calling the civil war that had just ended recently), that place used to be called the Royal air force's arsenal. And thus, there were all sorts of buildings. The numerous buildings with massive chimneys were used for manufacturing iron. Next to them were piles and piles of timber used for ship constructions and repairs.

The large red brick building was the control center. The three colored flag of Reconquista could be seen fluttering proudly. But the thing that stood out most was the large battleship which seemed to reach the skies.

The Lexington, the flagship of the fleet, was anchored and covered by a cloth, similar to a large tent, to protect it from rain. The warship stretched across two hundred meters, and was placed on top of a large wooden board so that it could be remodeled as soon as possible.

The king of Albion, Oliver Cromwell, was observing the construction along with some attendants.

"What a big, dependable looking ship. With a ship like this, doesn't it feel like we can rule the world, chief rigger?"

"You speak too highly of me."

The chief rigger appointed to the fleet led by the Lexington, Sir Henry Bowood, replied half heartedly. He was on the Reconquista's side and was the commander of the cruisers during the revolutionary war. Credited with destroying two enemy ships, he was promoted to chief rigger of the Lexington. He was to assume the position of captain when the remodeling was completed. It was one of the

customs of the Albion air force.

“Look at those big cannons!”

Cromwell pointed at the cannons on the side of the ship.

“These new weapons are like the symbol of trust I have placed upon you. These were made by gathering Albion’s alchemists. They have an extended body, which according to the calculations…”

The longhaired woman next to Cromwell replied, “They have a firing range of approximately 1.5 times that of the cannons used on Tristain and Germania warships.”

“Thank you, Miss Sheffield.”

Bowood looked at Sheffield. She emitted a somewhat cold atmosphere. She was around her mid-twenties and wore a neat, thin black coat. He had never seen such a weird appearance. She wasn’t wearing a mantle… was she even a mage?

Cromwell nodded with satisfaction and patted Bowood on the back.

“She’s from Rub' al Khali. She designed these cannons from the technology she learned from the elves. Her insights in technology… do not follow our magic arts. She possesses knowledge of technology that is new to us. You should get to know each other.”

Bowood nodded in a bored manner. He was actually a royalist, but he strongly believed that soldiers should not get involved in politics. In other words, he was a purely militaristic person. The fleet commander, who outranked him, had joined the rebel army, and so he had no choice but to participate in the revolutionary war as a captain of the Reconquista fleet. For him, who had exerted his utmost for the sake of upholding Albion's tradition - Noblesse oblige, a noble duty, Albion was still a mere kingdom. Cromwell was someone despicable who had just seized power and the throne.

“There probably isn't a fleet on Halkeginia that can match the power of our Royal Sovereign fleet now,” Bowood had purposefully called the fleet by its old name. Noticing his cynicism, Cromwell smiled.

“Mr Bowood. The Royal Sovereign no longer exists in Albion.”

“True. However, if you attend the wedding ceremony with these new cannons, I’m afraid it will probably be seen as a vulgar demonstration of power.”

Cromwell, the first holy king and president of the council of nobles, and the cabinet ministers of The Republic of the Holy Albion (Albion’s new name) were to attend the wedding ceremony of the Tristain princess and the prince of Germania. They were to travel by the Lexington fleet.

Bringing new models of weapons for a visit of good will would be seen as something along the lines of gunboat diplomacy.

Cromwell replied casually, “Ah yes, I haven’t explained the scheme for this 'good will visit' to you, have I?”

“Scheme?”

Another conspiracy? Bowood felt a headache coming.

Cromwell softly whispered in Bowood’s ears.

“What?! I haven’t heard of such a disgraceful act in all my life!”

“It’s all a part of military movements,” said Cromwell, uncaringly.

“Didn’t we just recently sign a non-aggression treaty with Tristain! In Albion’s long history, we haven’t broken a single treaty!” shouted an enraged Bowood.

“Mr. Bowood. I shall not forgive you for any further political criticisms. This is something that the council has decided upon and approved. Do you plan on going against the council? Since when did you become a politician?”

With that, Bowood was speechless. To him, soldiers were swords and shields that did not object. They were the faithful watchdogs of the country, and proud ones at that. If it was a decision from someone of higher rank, then they could only follow those orders.

“You will soil our country’s name throughout Halkeginia. Our country will be known for cowardly breaking treaties.” Said Bowood, disturbed.

“Soil the country’s name? All of Halkeginia shall be ruled under our Reconquista flag. When we regain the holy lands from the elves, no one will care about such trivial matters.”

Bowood drew close to Cromwell.

“Breaking a treaty is something trivial? Do you plan on betraying even your own country?!”

A nearby man pulled out his wand and restrained Bowood. Bowood could recognize the face hidden underneath the hood.

“Y-Your highness?” a shocked Bowood whispered.

The face was of Prince Wales, who had died in battle.

“Captain, I wonder if you would be able to say those words to your once superior officer?”

Bowood dropped down to his knees. Wales reached out his hands and kissed Bowood. He became pale. Those hands were as cold as ice.

Cromwell walked out with his attendants. Wales also followed suit. The only one left was Bowood, standing still, shocked. Wales, who had died, was living and moving. Bowood was a triangular mage in the water arts. Even he, an expert in water magic, which governed the composition of living things, had not heard of a spell that could bring life to someone once dead.

Perhaps it was a golem? No, that body was filled with life. Being a user in the water branch, he knew perfectly well the flow of water inside living things, including that of Wales.

It was definitely an unknown form of magic. And Cromwell could control it. He remembered a convincing rumor he had heard, and started to shake.

That the holy king Cromwell could control “Void”…

Was that just Void magic?

…The legendary “Zero” branch of magic.

With a shaking voice, Bowood whispered, “…What the hell is he planning to do to Halkeginia?”

Cromwell spoke with the noble walking alongside him.

“Viscount, join the Lexington fleet as the commander of the dragoons.”

Under a feathered hat, Wardes’ eyes gleamed.

“Are you telling me to keep an eye on him?”

He shook his head, rejecting Wardes’ presumption.

“That man won’t betray us. He’s too stubborn and straightforward, which is why we can trust him. I’m just lending him your power, seeing as you led the magic defense squad once. Have you ever ridden a dragon before?”

“No. But there is no beast in Halkeginia that I cannot master.”

Cromwell smirked in agreement. He suddenly turned to Wardes.

“Viscount, why do you obey me?”

“Do you doubt my loyalty?”

“Not at all. You yield such fine results yet you have no requests.”

Wardes laughed lightly. He touched the artificial hand that was put on him recently.

“I only want to see the thing your Excellency will show me.”

“The holy lands?”

Wardes nodded.

“I believe what I’m searching for lies there.”

“You ‘believe’? You really don’t have any desires, do you.” Said Cromwell.

Cromwell was originally a clergyman, but he didn’t have a speck of faith in him. Wardes cast his eyes downwards on an old silver locket. Inside was a drawn portrait of a beautiful woman. His heart, which always appeared cold to people around him, started to warm up. After looking at the small portrait, he whispered, “No, your Excellency. I’m a man who desires the most in this world.”

Meanwhile in Henrietta’s room, inside the royal palace of Tristain, servants were busy sewing the wedding dress Henrietta was to wear. Marianne, the queen, was also there. She watched with a smile while her daughter was dressed in a pure white dress. However, Henrietta's expression was like that of ice. When the servants sewing asked her things about the sleeves and the position of the waist, she simply nodded. Watching her daughter in that state, Marianne dismissed the servants.

“My dear daughter, you don’t seem well.”

“Mother.”

Henrietta buried her face in her mother's knees.

“I understand you don’t want this wedding.”

“No, it’s not that at all. I’m a happy person. I’m able to marry. Didn’t you once say that a woman was happy if she got to marry?”

In contrast to her words, Henrietta’s beautiful face became miserable and she started crying in grief. Marianne patted her daughter’s head gently.

“You have someone you love?”

“I had someone I loved. It’s like I’m flowing in a very fast river. Everything has passed by me. Love, kind words… nothing remains now.”

Marianne shook her head.

“Love is like the measles. If you cool down, you will forget about it.”

“How can I possibly forget…”

“You are a princess. You must forget what you must forget. The people will be uneasy if they see you like this.” Said Marianne in an admonishing tone.

“What am I marrying for?” Henrietta asked sadly.

“For the future.”

“For the future of…the country and the people?”

Marianne shook her head.

“It’s also for your future as well. Cromwell of the Reconquista, who’s in control of Albion, is an ambitious man. According to what I’ve heard, he has control over ‘Void’."

“Isn’t that the legendary branch of magic?”

“Yes. If it is the truth, then it would be dreadful, Henrietta. Having too much power corrupts people. Even though we have a non-aggression treaty, a man like him won’t just look down at Halkeginia from the skies obediently. It’s better for you to be in a powerful country, like Germania."

Henrietta embraced her mother.

“…Forgive me Mother for being so selfish.”

“It’s alright. Love is everything at your age. It’s not like I don't understand.”

They embraced each other tightly.

Chapter Six: Treasure Hunting

Tabitha hid beside a tree with her breath held. In front of her was a temple that had been reduced to ruins. Columns that once boasted magnificence had collapsed and fences had rusted away. Bright stained glass windows had been shattered, and weeds filled the garden. It was the temple of a pioneering village that had been abandoned decades ago. It was completely desolate; no one was close by. However, when the sunlight shone upon it, there was a somewhat pastoral atmosphere to the place. The place would probably be where travelers would set up for lunch or the like.

A loud explosion suddenly broke the calm atmosphere. Kirche had set a tree next to the gatepost on fire. Tabitha, in the shade of the trees, gripped her wand. The reason why the pioneering village had been abandoned came dashing out. It was an orc. It was two meters tall and weighed about five times that of an average human. Its fat ugly body was covered by skin peeled off from animals. With a large nose on its face, it looked much like a pig. In fact, you could say that it was a pig that stood on two legs.

There were around ten of them. Orcs liked human children, and being attacked by a group of creatures with such troublesome tastes, the villagers abandoned the village and fled from it. The villagers told the lord of the area, but the lord disliked dispatching soldiers in forests, and so ignored their requests. This village was one of the many villages in Halkeginia that had had this happen.

The orc conversed with the others through sounds similar to that of a pig, while pointing at the fire blazing around the gatepost. It then yelled angrily at every one of them.

“Fugii! Pigii! Agii! Nguiiii!”

Waving the clubs in their hands, the orcs were obviously angry. There was a fire, which meant humans were nearby. They were enemies, and the fire was a bait. Watching this, Tabitha considered which spell she would use. There were more enemies than she had expected. She couldn’t continuously fire spells out. If they didn’t carry everything out smoothly, they could easily lose the advantage of their surprise attack.

Just then, the air around the orcs shimmered and seven bronze maidens appeared before them. They were Guiche’s golems. Tabitha knitted her eyebrows. That wasn't what they had decided on. Guiche must have gotten impatient.

Guiche’s seven valkyries charged at the head orc. They thrust their short spears at it. The tip of the spears sank into the orc’s stomach and the orc was knocked back onto the ground. However, the wound was shallow. Its thick skin and fat had acted as its shield, protecting its internal organs from damage. It quickly stood back up, and waved its club, ignoring its small wound. The other orcs rushed over with their clubs, swinging them at the bronze maidens. The clubs the orcs were swinging, were about the size of a human. One hit on the delicate golems, and they were sent flying, broken on the ground.

Tabitha started reciting an incantation while waving her wand. Water, wind, wind. One water and two winds. The two elements intertwined with each other and the spell was complete. The vapor in the air froze and became several icicles. They skewered the wounded orc from all directions. It was one of Tabitha’s strongest attacks, 'Windy Icicle'. The wounded orc fell to the ground at once.

Kirche, who was watching on top of a tree that was separated by a fair distance from Tabitha’s hiding spot, waved her wand. Fire, Fire. Two fires. A ball of fire, larger than a normal fireball spell, attacked the orcs. It was the 'Flame Ball' spell. With agile movements that didn’t seem possible for their size, they tried avoiding the ball of fire. However, as if it were attached to a string, the ball of fire was homing. It shot inside an orc's howling mouth, and its head burst into flames. However, that was the end of such effective spells. They couldn’t keep using such strong spells.

The orcs were scared, but they realized they were being attacked by only a few mages. After realizing this, they remembered a long battle they had with humans once. If they lost, they would lose in an instant. However, only two of them were killed by magic so far, which meant that the humans' attack had failed.

Their anger overcame their fear. Their sharp noses twitched, trying to find the humans. A young delicious smelling human could be smelt from outside the temple’s garden. The orcs ran at once. Suddenly a person with a sword carried on his back appeared. Next to him was a fire salamander. Without hesitation the orcs continued to charge forward. The salamander would be a strong foe, but with only the two, it would be no problem. The human warrior wasn’t even going to be a problem. It was said that one orc can match five human warriors. And that was for skilled warriors. A child like that would be disposed of with one swing of the club.

Saito whispered to the salamander next to him.

“I’ll attack them from the right. Stop any of those monsters from reaching Kirche.”

Fire flickered from the tip of the mouth of the fiery lizard, and it nodded with a “kyuru kyuru.” The large pigs formed groups to attack. They were trying to intimidate them. Saito’s hand was shaking. *I’m sorry for being well dressed. What the hell is that. Scary.*

The orc was wearing a necklace. After a better glance, it could be seen that it was a necklace made from a straw rope and human skulls. *My world’s rules really don’t exist in this world.* The beast’s horrible stench could be smelt.

With a shaking left hand, he grabbed Derflinger. The runes on the back of his hand shone. The anger and the vigor bursting inside his body made his body hot. He started tapping a rhythm with his index finger on the grip of the sword, allowing him to compose himself. He calculated the timing of his leap.

Tap, tap, tap… The rhythm of his pulse.

Saito opened his eyes, and gazed at the orcs who were roaring towards him.

An orc swung its club at the child. It was a hit… It should have been that is. But its club only hit the ground. It tried raising its head to see its surroundings, but its vision slipped down. Its neck wouldn’t move. Its hands reached desperately for its head only to find that it was missing.

Saito had jumped faster than the orc’s swing, and had cleaved off its head. How was that! The decapitated orc tumbled to the ground. Saito leapt at a nearby orc. In an instant, he cut down the stunned orc. With the force of his sword he finished it off. To the left, the fiery lizard was battling an orc, scattering fire everywhere. Flame overpowered the orc and sent a blaze of inferno to its head.

Losing three allies already, they surrounded Saito cautiously. With his sword ready, Saito stared at the orcs with a cold gaze. It was as if a dragon was glaring at them. Their instincts told them that he was dangerous. It told them that they couldn’t win against him. The orcs looked at each other.

But, it was a human. They couldn’t possibly lose. It must have been a mistake

just then. Ignoring their instinct, experience and common sense, they roared and went in for an all out attack.

And so, they lost their lives. With the help of magic, Saito and Flame decimated them within two minutes.

Tabitha's dragon landed on the ground. If the wind dragon had been hurt, it would mean that they would have to walk home, so they decided he wasn't allowed in the battle. Coming down from the tree, Kirche gave Guiche a shove.

"Ouch! What are you doing?"

"It's your fault that we got in such a mess!"

The plan was to lure them into a pit that Verdandi had dug and light the oil that was prepared in that pit. All the orcs would then burn to their deaths.

"As if they would just all fall into a pit like that. The first to make a move wins. I only put that into practice." Grumbled Guiche.

"Your mole dug it right? Have some faith!"

"Well we're all ok, so it's fine," said Saito

Siesta, who was hiding and shaking, rushed over to Saito and hugged him, overcome with emotion.

"That was incredible! Killing those violent orcs in a matter of no time! You're incredible Saito!"

Siesta then timidly glanced at the corpses of the orcs.

"With these around I guess you can't really go calmly pick mushrooms in the forest."

Saito wiped off the blood and fat stuck on Derflinger with a leaf. His hands were still shaking. *Haven't gotten used to battle yet I guess*, he thought. *Even though they were monsters, they were living things. Things like battles are easily said but they are really living things killing each other. Even if you win, it's not a good feeling. Although I have powers of the familiar Gandálfr, my body is still*

made of flesh and blood. If I had slipped and received a blow from one of those clubs… it might be me lying there now.

Noticing Saito's hands were shaking, Siesta firmly grasped them. Are you ok? Her eyes seemed to ask. Saito forced a smile and nodded.

"You were incredible… but I guess such dangerous things are bad…" whispered Siesta.

Meanwhile, despite the battle, Kirche acted as if nothing had happened. Looking at the map, she said, "Um, within the temple there's an altar… and beneath that altar there's a hidden chest."

"And within that chest…"

Guiche gulped.

"Lies the gold and silver and legendary treasure 'Brisingamen[1]' that the priest hid when he abandoned the temple, apparently."

Kirche brushed her hair triumphantly.

"What's a Brisingamen?" asked Guiche.

Kirche read the notes on the map.

"Umm, it seems like it's a necklace made of gold. It's made from 'blazing gold'! Wow, even the name makes me excited. When you wear it you will be protected from any disaster and…"

That night… they crowded around a bonfire in the garden of the temple. Everyone had a weary face. Guiche said bitterly, "So the so called treasure was that?"

Guiche pointed at a color faded accessory and a few dirty copper coins. Underneath the altar, there was a chest. However, it was full of junk that they

didn’t even consider taking back home.

“This is made of brass. These cheap necklaces and ear rings, these aren’t that ‘Brisingamen’ right?”

Kirche didn’t reply. She just filed her nails with a bored look. Tabitha was reading a book as usual. Saito was lying down, gazing at the moon.

“Hey Kirche, that’s the seventh one already! We followed those maps with such effort and yet all we get are a few copper coins! The treasures aren’t even close to what the notes of the maps say! Those maps are all hoaxes!”

“Shut up. I said it before, there -might- be a real map within that bundle.”

“It’s too mean! Monsters and beasts dwell in ruins and caves after all! Only getting this in return for defeating monsters is far from enough!”

Guiche held the artificial rose in his mouth and lay down on a spread out blanket.

“Well yeah. If you could get treasure by just simply killing monsters, then no one would be poor.”

A gloomy atmosphere drifted amongst them. But Siesta’s cheerful voice drove it away.

“Everyone, dinner's ready!”

Siesta started dividing the stew for everyone from the pot on the bonfire. It smelled good.

“This is good! Wow, it’s really good. What kind of meat did you use?” Guiche asked while stuffing his mouth full.

Everyone else tasted it and started to say how delicious it was. Siesta smiled and said, “Orc’s meat.”

Guiche suddenly spat out the stew. Everyone stared slack jawed at Siesta.

“I-It was a joke! I made it from a wild rabbit. I caught it with a trap.”

Siesta went on to explain how she had set up traps to catch rabbits and partridges, and collected herbs and vegetables for the stew, while everyone else was hunting for treasure.

“Don’t scare me like that. But, you’re really handy, being able to make something so nice from things in a forest.” Said Kirche in a relieved tone.

“It comes from living in a village,” said Siesta shyly.

“What’s this stew called? The herbs you’ve used are quite different from usual. I’ve never even seen some of these vegetables.” Said Kirche while spinning one of the vegetables on her fork.

“It’s a stew that’s made in my village, called Yosenabe.” Explained Siesta while stirring the pot.

“My father taught me how to make it. From edible wild plants, roots of plants… My father learned it from my grandfather. It’s a specialty in my village.”

Thanks to the delicious food, they felt more relaxed. Ten days had passed since they had left the school. As Saito gazed up at the sky, he wondered what Louise was doing.

“Is it good, Saito?”

Next to him, Siesta smiled warmly. Stuffing his mouth full with stew, he smiled back. Siesta’s smile, the taste of the stew, they both reminded him of something. He had no idea how long he had been away but Saito remembered his own world.

After dinner, Kirche spread out the map again.

“Let’s just give up and return to school,” urged Guiche, but Kirche did not budge.

“Just one more. One more.”

As if she was obsessed, Kirche’s eyes gleamed over the maps. Picking one map, she placed it on the ground.

“Ok this one! If this one is also a hoax we’re going back to school!”

“What’s the treasure?”

Arms crossed, Kirche replied, “Dragon’s Raiment.”

Siesta, who was eating stew after everyone had finished, choked slightly on her food.

“R-Really?”

“What about it? Do you know something about it? It’s close to a village called Tarbes. Now where’s Tarbes…”

Siesta replied quickly, “It’s in the direction of La Rochelle. There’s a big field… It’s my home town.”

The next morning, whilst they were riding the wind dragon, Siesta explained to everyone. There wasn’t much to tell. There was a temple near the village and in that temple there was something called the Dragon’s Raiment.

“Why is it called ‘Dragon’s Raiment’?”

“Apparently you can fly when you put it on,” said Siesta, weakly.

“Fly? So it’s a wind type item?”

“It’s really not that important of a thing…” said Siesta, looking troubled.

“Why?”

“It’s a hoax. It’s one of those ‘treasures’ you can find anywhere. It’s all just the name. Yet the locals are grateful… they decorate the temple, worship it…”

“Really?”

Siesta then proceeded to say nervously.

“Actually… the owner of it was my grandfather. One day, my grandfather appeared in the village. Apparently he told everyone that he came from the east with the Dragon's Raiment.”

“Wow…”

“But no one believed him. Everyone says that my grandfather was weird.”

“Why?”

“Someone told him to fly with it, but he told them it couldn’t. He made a lot of excuses, but no one had a reason to believe him. After that, he said that it ‘couldn’t fly anymore’ and settled down in the village. He worked really hard, and gave his money to nobles, asking them to put a spell of permanence on the ‘Dragon's Raiment’. He treated it with a lot of care.”

“What a strange person. It must have been hard on your family?”

“No, apart from the Dragon's Raiment, he was a nice, hard working person. Everyone liked him.”

“It’s something famous within the village right? Just like that Yosenabe… Then we can’t take it back with us.”

“But… It’s like our family property… If Saito wanted to, I could ask my dad to show it to you,” Siesta said in a troubled voice.

Just as Saito thought *hoaxes are useless anyway*, Kirche remarked, “Even if it is a hoax, there are ways to sell hoaxes. There are many people with different tastes in this world.”

“You’re a horrible woman.” Guiche said, shocked.

The wind dragon flapped its wings and headed towards Tarbes.

Meanwhile at school, Louise was still skipping lessons. She didn’t want to meet

anyone in her current mood. She only left her room to eat in the dining hall and when she went to take a bath. She knew that Saito was living in a tent in the Vestri courtyard so she went down there a few days ago to see how he was doing, but no one was there. When she asked Montmorency, who was passing by, she found out that Saito, Guiche, Kirche and Tabitha had been skipping lessons to go treasure hunting. The teachers were apparently mad and were going to make them clean the whole auditorium when they got back. She felt even sadder when she thought about how much fun they must be having. She felt as though she was the only one being left out.

Louise cried in her bed again. Whenever she saw the empty haystack, tears would come to her eyes. A knock came from the door. The door opened with a clank as soon as Louise replied that it wasn't locked. The school headmaster Old Osman was at the door, which surprised Louise. Louise quickly put on her gown and got off her bed.

"How have you been feeling?"

Feeling down, Louise replied, "I'm sorry I've made you worry. It's really nothing. I just don't feel very well…"

Osman pulled out a chair and sat down.

"You've rested for quite a long time. I was worried, but it seems you're alright."

Louise nodded, and sat down on a chair. With a weary face, she stared out the window.

"Have you finished the edict?"

Louise gasped and hung her head. With a sorry expression, she shook her head.

"Seems like you haven't from the looks of it."

"I'm sorry."

"There's still two weeks. Think about it slowly. It's your important friend's wedding after all. Make sure you choose your words carefully."

Louise nodded. She was ashamed that she had forgotten about the edict because

she was so absorbed with her own thoughts. "I’m terrible aren’t I. She considers me as a friend, and even gave me the role of being the maiden.”

Osman stood up.

“By the way, where’s that familiar of yours?”

She averted her eyes and kept silent. Osman smiled.

“Did you two have a fight?”

“When you’re young, you fight about trivial things. It’s because young people don't know how to compromise. Sometimes, these cracks will develop into something irreparable. You should be careful.”

Laughing, Osman left the room. After the door shut behind him, Louise whispered, “It’s not something small…”

Louise went to her desk. She ignored everything else and opened the Founder’s Prayer Book. And as if clearing her thoughts, she closed her eyes. She concentrated, trying to think of an edict. I must think of a great edict for Henrietta.

Louise kept her eyes closed. *Eh?* There was a bright light. Suddenly she could see letters on the pages. Louise’s eyes froze. However, in the next moment, they faded from the pages like mist. *What was that?* She thought, while looking at the pages.

I can’t see it anymore. My eyes are probably just tired, she thought.

“It’s all Saito’s fault” she whispered.

Chapter Seven: Dragon's Raiment

Saito’s eyes went round at the sight of the “Dragon’s Raiment”. They were in the temple built close to Tarbes, Siesta’s hometown. That was where the “Dragon’s Raiment” lay. Actually it would be more correct to say that the temple had been built to cover the Dragon’s Raiment. The shape which Siesta’s grandfather had built the temple into made Saito nostalgic. The temple was built in the corner of a field. Its door was made by logs joined together, and its walls were made from planks and mortar instead of stone. On top of an area of the wooden floor that was painted dark green, lay the Dragon’s Raiment. Perhaps it was due to the permanence spell… but there were no signs of rusting. It was as if it had just been made.

Kirche and Guiche looked at the Dragon’s Raiment, dispirited. As if struck by curiosity, Tabitha looked at it with interest. Amazed, Saito stared at the Dragon’s Raiment.

“Saito, are you ok? If I showed you anything to make you feel bad…” said Siesta in a worried voice.

Saito didn’t reply. He continued to gaze at the Dragon’s Raiment as though he were deeply moved.

“Of course this thing can’t fly,” said Kirche.

Guiche nodded.

“This is some sort of canoe right? And look at the wings, they can't even move. It’s like toy bird or something. Not to mention that even the wings of small dragons are the size of these wings. Dragons and wyverns can only fly because they can flap their wings. So much for ‘Dragon’s Raiment’.”

Guiche pointed at the Dragon’s Raiment and nodded, convinced that he was right.

“Saito… Are you really alright?”

Saito grasped Siesta’s shoulders as she was peering into his face. Saito spoke feverishly.

“Siesta.”

“Y-Yes?”

“Did your grandfather leave behind anything else?”

“Um… the only noteworthy things are his grave and a few of his belongings.”

“Show them to me.”

The grave of Siesta’s grandfather was located in the village cemetery. The tombstones were made from large white stones. Among them there was a tombstone made from a black stone, creating a clear contrast with the others.

Words were inscribed on the tombstone.

“My grandfather made this tombstone before he died. It’s written in a language from a different country, so no one has been able to read it. I wonder what it says…” said Siesta.

Saito read it out loud.

“Navy ensign Sasaki Takeo, rests in another world.”

“What?”

Siesta’s eyes widened at Saito, who read it fluently.

Saito looked at Siesta feverishly, causing her to blush.

“Stop… If you look at me like that…”

Black hair, black pupils… This nostalgic feeling… So that’s why, Saito thought, realizing why he was feeling nostalgic.

“Siesta, you were told that your hair and eyes were similar to your grandfather’s

right?” Said Saito much to Siesta’s surprise.

“Y-Yes! How did you know that?”

Returning to the temple, Saito touched the “Dragon’s Raiment”. When he did, the runes on the back of his left hand started to shine. *I see, so this must also be considered a “weapon”,* Saito thought as he looked at the machine guns sticking out from the wings. As the runes shone, the construction and the controls of the "Dragon's Raiment" came clearly to Saito. He could fly this himself, he thought.

Saito found the fuel tank and opened it. Just as he expected, it was empty. No matter how well it was preserved, it still couldn’t fly without gasoline. *I wonder how he had wandered into Halkeginia with this plane.…* Saito wanted to trace the trail, no matter what answer it would lead to.

Siesta returned from her parent’s home.

“Everyone was really surprised since I’m two weeks earlier than I said I would be.”

Siesta excitedly handed over the item in her hands to Saito. They were old goggles, probably the ones her grandfather wore as a navy ensign. He was like the owner of the staff of destruction which Saito had used to defeat Fouquet’s golem, someone from another world. A foreigner, like Saito.

“Grandfather only left this behind. He didn’t keep a diary or anything like that. But father said he left behind a will.”

“A will?”

“Yes. ‘If someone who could read the inscription on the tomb appeared, give him the Dragon’s Raiment’.”

“Meaning it’s mine now?”

“Yes. Father said it was alright to give it to you. It was a bother to take care of

anyway… It’s big and there are some people who worship it… but it’s just collecting dust in this village.”

“Well, I won’t hesitate then,” said Saito.

“Father also wanted me to tell you something.”

“What did he say?”

“He said he wants you to return the Dragon’s Raiment to the king. King… I wonder which king he means. We don’t even know which country my grandfather is from…”

“He’s from my country,” said Saito.

“Really? So that’s why you could read the words on the tombstone. Wow! I’m kind of moved. My grandfather was from the same country as Saito. It seems like fate.” Siesta said absentmindedly.

“Then grandfather really did come to Tarbes using the Dragon’s Raiment.”

“This isn’t called the Dragon’s Raiment.”

“What is it called in Saito’s country?”

Looking at the “Dragon’s Raiment”, Saito remembered a plastic model he put together when he was small. Why would someone call it the "Dragon's Raiment"? Perhaps it was just easier to understand that way. The same way it was with the “staff of destruction”.

He looked at the country’s symbol drawn on the wings and the body of the place. A red dot. It seemed like it had white colored around it but it was covered by the same dark green paint used on the rest of it. The character for the dragon zodiac sign was written on the black cowling. It was probably the name of the unit he was in.

Saito felt very nostalgic from merely seeing such an old thing from his own world.

Saito replied, “It’s called a Zero fighter. It was a fighter aircraft used in the past

in my country.”

“Zero fighter? Fighter aircraft?”

“In other words, an airplane.”

“It’s a plane? The one you mentioned before?”

Saito nodded.

That day, they all stayed at Siesta’s home. As nobles were staying over, even the village chief came to greet them. Siesta introduced Saito to her family, her father, mother and siblings. Siesta was the eldest daughter of the eight siblings. Her parents viewed Saito in a harsh light at first, but that was soon broken when Siesta told them that he was looking after her at the academy. Having not been home for a while, Siesta looked quite happy being surrounded by family. Saito was envious of her. When he thought about it, Louise, Kirche, Tabitha and Guiche all had families. He also had one, but he couldn’t meet them like this. Even if he wanted to meet them, he didn’t even know where to start.

In the evening, Saito gazed out at the wide field. The sun was setting behind the mountains beyond the field. It was a huge field. Just as Siesta had said, flowers were blooming everywhere. *So this is the beautiful field that Siesta wanted to show me.*

The pilot who ended up in this world with the zero fighter probably tried to find a way home by flying in the sky… But his fuel ran out and he landed on this field. The field was flat and wide, so landing here was probably easy. He couldn’t fly when he was asked to because he had run out of gasoline.

Siesta came to Saito, who was still gazing at the field, drowned in the memories of his world. She was wearing a brown skirt, wooden shoes and a dark green cotton shirt, instead of her usual maid outfit. Like the field in front of him, her appearance was like that of the smell of sunlight.

“So you were here! Dinner’s ready. Father insists we eat together.” Said Siesta shyly.

“I did ask you to come visit, but I didn’t expect it to really happen.”

Siesta stretched both her arms out at the wide field before them. The setting sun bathed the field with a beautiful light.

“Isn’t this field beautiful? This is what I wanted to show you, Saito.”

“Yeah, it is.”

Siesta then cast her eyes downwards and twiddled her fingers.

“My father said that meeting with someone who came from the same country as grandfather must be fate. He asked if you could settle in the village. And then said if you did then I… could stop my work at the academy and return here with you.”

Saito didn’t reply. He just stared at the sky. He was thinking of how kind Siesta was to him. If she said any more nice things to him, his heart would probably melt. He felt lonely when he saw Siesta happily sitting and chatting with her family. After seeing the zero fighter, his homesickness grew much more intense.

Siesta looked at Saito who was still staring at the sky and smiled.

“But, it’s alright. I know it won’t work out. You’re like a bird. You’re bound to fly away some day.”

Saito then decided to tell Siesta the truth.

“Your grandfather said he came from the east, right?”

“Um…yes,” Siesta said, slightly worried.

“Your grandfather, like I, wasn’t born in this world.”

“You were born in Rub' al Khali in the east, right?”

“No. It is much, much further than that.” Said Saito in a serious tone. “It’s a different world. I’m not from this world.”

“You’re just playing around with me aren’t you? If you don’t like me, then just say it.” Said Siesta, pouting her lips.

“No, it’s not that at all. I’m not playing around with you.”

“Is there someone waiting for you there?”

“No. But my family is waiting. I'll someday have to leave this world for my own.”

Saito turned to Siesta, and said weakly, “That’s why I can’t do the things you mentioned.”

Saito was very serious. Siesta knew he wasn’t joking around.

“I can protect people with my power while I’m here. But that’s all. I don’t have the right to reside with anyone. I don’t.”

“But my grandfather did, didn’t he?”

“Your grandfather didn’t have the power of Gandálfr like I do. Up until now, there have been many enemies, but I’ve defeated them with this power. I feel as though this power will guide me.”

“Then… Can I wait for you? I don’t have any qualities, but I can wait. If you try your best to find a way home and you still don’t, then…”

Siesta then became silent. *If that really happened, what would I do?* Saito thought. His pulse raced just by looking at Siesta. She was cute, and stunning without clothes on. She’s kind and can even cook. She’s a great girl. All the more reason why he couldn’t promise her.

Regaining herself, Siesta smiled.

“A carrier owl just sent this. It seems like the teachers are very angry. Miss Zerbst and Mr. Gramont were pale. They mentioned me as well. They said that I could have a holiday for the time being. The princess’s wedding is coming soon anyway. So until the holiday ends, I’ll be here.”

Saito nodded.

“Um… so can you make that Dragon’s Raiment fly?”

With gasoline, probably, thought Saito.

“I’m not sure. I have to talk it over with someone first. If I do get it to fly, I want to go to the lands in the east. Your grandfather flew over from there, right? There must be some hint there.” Said Saito, watching the setting sun.

“Really? If you could get it to fly, then it would be wonderful. The Dragon’s Raiment was called a Zero fighter, right? If you get it to fly, then please let me ride it just once.”

Saito nodded.

“I can let you ride it as many times as you like. It was your family’s to begin with anyway.”

The following morning, using a few of Guiche's dad's connections, Saito managed to obtain the services of a few dragoons and their dragons. They carried the zero fighter in a large net to the academy.

Guiche initially wondered why they were carrying the useless "Dragon's Raiment", but because Saito insisted on it, he gave in. The costs of making a large net and calling the dragoons were ridiculously high. Saito was troubled because he obviously couldn’t afford the transportation fees. However, as soon as the Zero fighter arrived in the courtyard of the academy, someone appeared in an instant and paid the fees. It was Mr Colbert.

Chapter Eight: Colbert's Laboratory

Mr Colbert was forty-two years old. He had been in the service of the academy for twenty years. He was a mage whose nickname was “Flame Serpent”. His hobby… or more accurately, his life was centered around research and invention. He had rushed down to the courtyard once he had seen the object being carried by the dragons from his research laboratory. His curiosity had been set alight.

“You, what’s that? Can you explain to me?”

Colbert’s face shone as he looked at Saito, who was watching the Zero fighter being lowered.

“Ah, I wanted to talk to you about it actually.”

“Me?”

Colbert was taken aback. Who exactly was this young commoner? All he knew was that he was the legendary familiar, Gandálfr, summoned by Miss Vallière. Born in Rub' al Khali, he was the only person to have called Colbert’s invention “great”.

“This is called an airplane. In my world, they’re seen flying everywhere.”

“This flies!? Wow! Wonderful!”

Colbert started looking at different parts of the zero fighter with a deep interest.

“Could it be that this is the wing! It seems like it can’t flap like normal wings! What about this windmill?”

“That’s called a propeller. When it spins it causes the airplane to go forward.”

Eyes wide in amazement, Colbert drew closer to Saito.

“I see! When it spins, it causes the power of wind! It’s well made, isn’t it! Could you fly it for me? Look, my hands are shaking from my curiosity!”

Troubled, Saito scratched his head.

“Um… To turn the propellers, I need gasoline.”

“Gasoline? What’s that?”

“That's what I want to talk to you about. You know the class we had where you showed us that invention of yours?”

“The joyful snake?”

“Yes! You had to burn oil to make it move right?”

“So you need oil? That’s a problem that is easily solved!”

“No, I don’t think that will work. It has to be gasoline.”

“Gasoline? Hm… well there are many different types of oil.”

Saito suddenly realized the dragoons were grinning broadly at them. Guiche whispered in Saito’s ear.

“Sorry if you are busy, but if you don’t pay the transportation fee…”

“You guys are nobles too aren’t you? Stop constantly bickering about money.”

“Hey, soldiers are poor you know.”

Saito smiled at Colbert.

“Mr. Colbert, could you possibly pay the transportation fee for the time being?”

Colbert’s laboratory was situated in a small area between the central tower and

the fire tower. It was much like an old dugout shed.

“At first I conducted experiments in my own room, but noise and bad smells come naturally with research. I was complained to by the people next to me shortly afterwards.”

The wooden racks were cluttered with bottles of medicine, test tubes, jars containing nostrum and the like. Next to that was a wall of bookshelves, crammed with books. There was a celestial globe made from parchment stuck on a sphere, and other various maps. There were lizards, snakes and birds that he had never seen before inside cages. A musky smell which was neither from dust nor mold filled the entire room. Saito pinched his nose.

“You’ll get used to the smell soon. A woman however wouldn’t, which is the reason why I’m single.”

Colbert sat down while muttering answers to questions he wasn’t being asked. He sniffed the gasoline he had gotten from the bottom of the zero fighter's fuel tank. Since a permanence spell was placed on the Zero fighter, the gasoline had not undergone any change in chemical composition.

“Hm… It’s a smell I’ve never smelt before. Giving off such a smell without even being heated… This must be quite easy to burn. If this were to be used as an explosive, it would be of alarming strength.”

He reached for a piece of parchment near him and started jotting down notes.

“If I duplicate this oil, that ‘airplane’ will fly?”

“Probably… If it hasn’t broken already.”

“Interesting! Concocting substances is tough work but I’ll try it!”

Muttering to himself, he took out all sorts of substances and lit his alcohol lamp.

“You’re called Saito, right?”

Saito nodded.

“You said in your home town, these could be seen flying everywhere? The

technology of the lands the elves govern in the east seem to far outclass any technology in Halkeginia."

Saito felt somewhat bad for lying to Colbert, who had been more than willing to help him in concocting gasoline and had also paid for the transportation fees.

"Mr Colbert, actually, I'm… not from this world. This airplane, and also the "Staff of Destruction" which destroyed Fouquet's golem and I, are from another world."

Colbert's hand suddenly stopped.

"What did you say?"

"I came from another world."

Colbert gazed steadily at Saito and then proceeded to nod his head, as though he were impressed.

"I see." he whispered.

"Aren't you surprised?"

"Well, of course I am. But you definitely seem like it. The way you speak and your behavior has a different feel. Hm, this is becoming more and more interesting."

"You're a strange person aren't you, Mr Colbert?"

"I get called strange by many people. I haven't even found someone willing to marry me yet. But I have a belief."

"A belief?"

"Yes. The nobles of Halkeginia treat magic as a mere tool… Like a broom, they only see it as a handy tool. I don't think magic is something like that. Magic could be used for so much more. Instead of simply sticking to the traditional uses of the different branches of magic, we should be experimenting to find different ways to utilize it."

Nodding, Colbert continued.

“After seeing you, my belief has grown stronger. Who would have thought there was another world! This shows that the rules of Halkeginia are not absolute! Interesting! Such an interesting topic! I want to see this world. There are probably lots of new things to be discovered! It’ll probably add a new page to my research! If you have any questions at all, just come and talk with me. Colbert the Flame Serpent will always help you.”

In the Austri courtyard, Saito was sitting in the cockpit of the Zero fighter and inspecting its parts. When he grasped the control stick, or even if he merely touched a switch, the runes on his left hand shone. Information would then flow to his brain, and tell him the condition of the part. When he moved the control stick, the ailerons of the wings and the elevator on the tail moved with a clank. The tail rudder moved when he stepped on the rudder bar and a cross shaped pointer appeared on the glass pane when he pushed the sight device switch on the instrument board. The engines on either side of the body of the plane were still alive. The shining Gandálfr runes told its user quite a bit. A smile appeared on Saito’s face.

“Partner, can this fly?”

“Yes.”

“Something like this flying… Your world is a strange one.”

Numerous students were watching Saito in the Zero fighter, but they quickly lost interest and left. *There are only a few nobles who would be interested in this, like Colbert,* Saito thought. Suddenly a girl appeared, proudly brushing her pinkish blond hair with her hand.

Louise stared at Saito and the thing he was in. As if she were angry, she pointed her finger at it and said, “What’s that?”

Saito raised his head from the cockpit and simply replied, “An airplane”. As they

still weren’t on good terms, he said it while facing away.

“Come down from that airplane thing, then.” Ordered Louise, pouting her lips while placing her hands on her hips. He ignored her and continued inspecting the parts of the Zero fighter. Louise grasped the end of a wing and started to make the Zero fighter wobble.

“I said come down, didn’t I?”

"Fine", whispered Saito as he got off and headed to Louise.

“Where did you go?”

“Treasure hunting.”

“What were you thinking, going without telling your master?”

Louise crossed her arms and stared at Saito. Saito noticed that her eyes were puffy.

“Didn’t you fire me?”

Louise cast her eyes downwards and spoke with a voice as if she were about to cry.

“I suppose you deserve a chance to explain yourself. If you have anything you want to say, then say it now.”

“What is there to explain? I didn’t do anything. This is about Siesta right? Siesta was just about to fall down so I tried to catch her. I then fell down as well, making it look as if I had pushed her down onto the bed."

The real reason was because Siesta had suddenly started to take off her clothes, but for Siesta’s sake he didn’t say that.

“Then, nothing really happened?”

“Nothing. Why were you so angry? That was the first time she came to the room. As if something like that would happen. Why were you angry, anyway? What me and Siesta do is none of your business, right?” Said Saito.

Louise only thinks of me as a familiar. The only reason she treats me better is because of her newfound compassion for animals.

“It’s none of my business, but in some ways it is.”

“Which one is it?”

Louise glared at Saito and groaned.

Louise tugged at his sleeve. She was whispering things like “Hey, apologize” and “Why are you being so uptight, you made me so worried”, but Saito wasn’t looking at Louise anymore. He was looking at the Zero fighter in a daze.

Louise had jumped to her own conclusions. She was ashamed that she had shut herself in her room and sulked. She drew out the deadly technique she had been saving. It was a girl’s secret technique, which would sweep away any suspicion, anger, contradiction, and even the fact that Louise drove Saito out. She burst into tears.

Buckets of tears came streaming down from her eyes.

“Where did you go all this time! Idiot! I hate you!”

Sniffling, she wiped the streaming tears with the back of her hand.

“H-Hey, don’t cry.”

Panicking, Saito placed his hands on Louise’s shoulder. Louise cried even harder.

“I hate you! I hate you!”

Kirche approached them, holding a mop and a dust cloth in her hands. Because they had skipped lessons, their punishment was to wipe the academy’s windows clean. As Saito was neither a noble nor a student at the academy, he didn’t have to do anything.

Guiche looked at Saito, who was comforting Louise, and grinned.

“You can’t just make your master cry like that.”

Kirche said dully, “Made up already? That’s no fun…”

Tabitha simply pointed at the two and said, “After the rain comes fair weather.”

That night…

Louise lay in her bed, tightly grasping her pillow. After Saito removed his parka, Louise slipped into it, as though it was a given. She was frantically pretending to read a book. Saito looked around the room which he had been away from for a week or so. Tableware was scattered everywhere.

“So you’ve been absent from lessons?”

Montmorency had mentioned it when they passed by her in the corridor.

Montmorency told Louise that she had been absent for too long, but Louise just ignored her and walked off.

Louise glared at Saito, slightly taken aback.

“So what?”

“Are you feeling ok?” asked Saito, who seemed to be worried.

She was about to say "Whose fault do you think it was that I have been skipping lessons?" but her pride got the better of her. Putting the blanket over her head, she snuggled under it. Saito scratched his head and looked at the haystack. *So she didn’t throw it out*, he thought, warmly glancing at Louise.

Three days passed.

Colbert awoke to the sound of hens. It seemed like he had fallen asleep without realizing. He had been absent from lessons and had shut himself in the laboratory for the past three days. In front of his eyes was a flask placed on top on an alcohol lamp. A glass tube stretched out of this, which let the heated catalyst cool and coagulate in the beaker to the left. This was the final step. Colbert sniffed at the gasoline he received from Saito and started cautiously reciting the alchemy incantation at the substance in the beaker while concentrating on the smell of the gasoline.

A poof of smoke rose from the beaker and the color of substance inside changed to a yellowish brown. He smelt it. The strong smell of gasoline drifted to his nose. Colbert opened the door with a thud and rushed outside.

“Saito! Saito! I’ve made it! I’ve made it! I’ve finished concocting it!”

Out of breath, Colbert approached Saito, who was inspecting the Zero fighter. Within the wine bottle he held out, there was a yellowish brown liquid. Saito opened the cover of the fuel tank, which was in front of the windshield. There was a lock on it, so he had Colbert cast the unlock spell on it. He poured two bottles of the gasoline in to it.

“I analyzed the composition of the oil you gave me,” said Colbert proudly.

“It seemed to be made from microorganisms in fossils, so I searched for

something similar. I decided to use the fossils of trees… in other words coal. I soaked that in a special catalyst and extracted a similar composition. After spending days doing that, I cast the alchemy spell on it. And that turned it into…”

“Gasoline, right?”

Colbert nodded and urged Saito “Quickly, turn those windmills for me. I was so excited that I didn’t even sleep.”

After filling the gas tank, Saito returned to the cockpit. Information on how to start the engine and fly the Zero fighter came rushing to his brain. To start the engine, the propeller must first be spun. Saito popped his head from the windshield.

“Mr. Colbert, could you spin the propeller using magic?”

“I thought it turned using the power from burning the oil?”

“To start the engine, the crank inside must be rotated manually first. I don't have a tool to turn the propeller, so if you could use magic please.”

Colbert nodded. Saito began to prepare the plane.

Firstly, he set the fuel source to the tank he had just put the fuel in. Then he set the mixture ratio lever and the propeller pitch lever to their optimum states. Saito’s hands moved by themselves. His Gandálfr power carried out all the operations. He opened the cowl flap and closed the lid of the oil-cooling radiator. The propellers rumbled as Colbert used his magic. With his eyes wide open, Saito pressed the ignition with his right hand at the proper time. His left hand gripping the throttle lever, he tilted it forward slightly.

A sputtering sound was heard and the engine started to run after the spark plug’s ignition. As they ratted, the propellers started to turn. The body of the airplane vibrated. The brake wasn’t on and so the plane started to propel itself forward.

Colbert watched with a moved expression on his face. After checking that the engine gauges were moving, Saito turned the ignition switch off.

Jumping out of the cockpit, he hugged Colbert.

“Mr Colbert, the engine started!”

“Yes, we did it! But why didn’t it fly?”

“There’s not enough gasoline. In order to fly, we would need at least five barrels.”

“That's a lot to make! But since I’ve already done so much, I’ll finish it!”

After Colbert had returned to his laboratory, Saito continued his adjustments. He didn’t have any tools however, so he cleaned the parts. Louise called out to Saito who was seemingly absorbed doing this.

“Hey, it’s time for dinner. What have you been doing? It’s already dark.”

“I started the engine!” yelled Saito happily.

But Louise replied back dully.

“Really now. Good for you. What happens after you get the engine running?”

“It flies! It will fly!”

“What will you do when it flies?” Asked Louise in a lonely voice.

Saito told Louise of the ideas that had gone through his mind in the past two to three days.

“I’m going to try to fly east.”

“East? I can’t believe you. Are you saying you’re heading to Rub' al Khali? I seriously can’t believe you!”

“Why? The owner of this airplane flew from there. I could maybe find some clues on how to return to my own world.” Said Saito feverishly.

Louise didn’t seem to bear any interest however. She replied back in a lonely voice.

“You’re my familiar. You can’t just do what you want. Also, the princess’s wedding is in five days. I have to read an edict then. But I haven’t thought of

anything good to say.”

Absorbed by the Zero fighter, Saito nodded as if he were listening. Once he knew that it could fly, he had become mesmerized by it.

Louise pulled his ear. She was bored. *He hasn’t paid any attention to me since he’s returned and instead just gazes at this ‘airplane’.*

“Listen to me!”

“I’m listening!”

“You’re not. You’re daydreaming. There’s no familiar that listens to its master while looking away!”

Louise dragged Saito back to her room.

Louise opened the Founder’s Prayer book in front of Saito.

“I’ll read out what I’ve thought already for the edict.”

With a cute cough, Louise began to read her edict.

“On this beautiful day, I, Louise Françoise Le Blanc de la Vallière, praying for the holy presence of the Founder, shall read the blessed edict…”

And then, Louise stopped.

“Continue?”

“From here on I have to give thanks to the four branches of magic. It has to be poetic and also in rhyme….”

“Then just make it rhyme.”

Louise pouted her lips as if she were sulking.

“I can’t think of anything. Writing it poetically is a pain in the neck. I’m not a poet or anything.”

“It’s ok, just read what you have written there.”

With a troubled look, she read her ‘poetic’ lines.

“Um, as fire is hot, one needs to be careful.”

“’Needs’ isn’t poetic. You should probably remember that.”

“Shut up. When the wind blows, those who sell barrels prosper. [1]

“Why would you use that proverb here?”

Louise, who didn’t seem to have any poetic talent, threw herself on the bed as if sulking and whispered, “I’m going to sleep.”

As was now usual, she changed while hiding her body behind her bedsheets. After turning off the lamp she called out to Saito, who had dove onto his haystack already.

“I said to sleep in my bed, didn’t I?”

Saito’s heart started racing.

“Really? It's ok?”

Louise didn't respond. Saito slipped into the bed thinking that she would probably get angry if he didn’t do what he was told.

Louise was still awake. She opened her mouth, as if she had wanted to talk to him.

“So, you’re really going to the lands in the east?”

“Yeah.” Saito replied.

“It’s dangerous you know. Those elves hate humans…”

“But humans live in the areas beyond the lands of the elves right? Like that place

called Rub' al.”

“The nature of those humans is completely different. It’ll be dangerous.”

It seemed like Louise was worried about letting Saito go.

“You’re still going to go?”

Saito thought about it briefly and nodded.

“Well, I might be able to find a clue to go back home.”

Louise was moving around under the sheets. Just as he was wondering what she was doing, she rested her head on his chest.

“Wha-“

“I'm just using it instead of my pillow!” Said Louise in a sulky and angry voice.

Louise placed her hands on his chest and lightly traced her fingers on it. Electricity seemed to flow through Saito’s spine.

“Don’t misunderstand me. This doesn’t mean I like you or anything!” Louise said in an embarrassed voice.

She then went back to her usual angry voice.

“Are you still going to go even if I say no?”

Saito remained silent.

“I thought so…” Louise whispered.

“This isn’t your world, is it… Of course you’d want to go back.”

Louise’s hair had a beautiful fragrance. The sound of her breathing was close as well. The two were silent. Saito was thinking of many things. Saito wasn’t talking, and Louise didn’t know what else to say, so she simply hugged Saito’s chest tightly.

“I don’t want you to leave. When you’re beside me I can sleep without worrying.

You make me angry…” Louise said in a tiny voice while embracing Saito.

Looks like those puffy eyes were because she didn’t sleep, thought Saito. Soon, Louise’s steady breathing, like that of a child’s, could be heard near Saito’s chest. She was fast asleep.

Louise was so pampered it made his heart race. *Seems like she’s uneasy without me around. Well, I’m a familiar after all.*

Listening to her breathing, Saito was deep in thought. He thought of the people he had met in this world.

He had met many people within his few months in Halkeginia. There were evil people, but also kind people.

There was Marteau from the kitchen who gave him food.

Osman, who had told him he would lend him his hand if he needed help.

Colbert, who had gladly concocted the gasoline for him.

A snob and often offensive, but a friendly person who had his own qualities, Guiche.

Not a human but a sword, a partner he had depended on, Derflinger.

Henrietta, the beautiful princess.

Courageous… and dead because of it, Prince Wales.

Tabitha, a silent person but someone who had saved him on numerous occasions.

The seductive Kirche, who said she liked Saito, though it might have been a joke.

Siesta, the cute and kind maid… who probably had feelings for him.

And lastly, his master next to him, who made his heart race. Arrogant and stuck up, but one who occasionally showed kindness that would melt his heart, Louise. A girl with pinkish blond hair and big reddish brown eyes.

When the time comes for me to go home, will I be able to leave these people with a smile on my face?

Will I be able to leave Louise with a smile?

I don't know.

But… Saito thought

The people who have been kind to me, I want to do the most I can for them.

At least while I'm in this world, I want to do something for them.

He hadn't felt these feelings before up until now.

For the time being, Saito embraced Louise's head gently.

Louise groaned in her sleep.

Chapter Nine: Declaration of War

The Germanian king, Albrecht the Third, had arranged for Princess Henrietta's wedding ceremony to take place in Germania's capital, Vindobona. The date of the ceremony: the first day of the month Nyuui.

Currently, the Mercator flagship of the Tristain fleet was to welcome the guests of the New Albion government by leading them to La Rochelle, where they would stay anchored in the skies above it.

The commander in chief of the fleet, Count La Ramée, sat in the quarterdeck in formal attire. Next to him, Captain Fevisu was stroking his moustache. It was far past the arranged time.

"They sure are late, Captain."

La Ramée replied with an irritated voice.

"Those Albion dogs who killed their king with their own hands are probably still busy acting like dogs."

The sailor on the top deck suddenly informed him of the fleet's approach in a loud voice.

"A fleet! From the left!"

With a large ship leading in front, which could easily be mistaken as a cloud, the Albion fleet had started to descend.

"So that's the standard of Albion's 'Royal Sovereign' fleet…" said the captain, watching the large ship in awe.

It was the ship that would have had the ambassador on it.

“Something that no one would want to meet on a battlefield, that’s for sure.”

The Albion fleet descended until they were level with Tristain's fleet. The Albion ship began sending signaling messages from the mast.

“We thank you for your fleet’s welcome. This is the captain of Albion’s Lexington.”

“We have an admiral on board! Using a captain to correspond… we’re being treated like fools” the captain said resentfully, while looking over Tristain’s weak array of ships.

“They’re probably thinking the world is within their grasp now that that they have that ship. Reply to them with ‘We give you our warmest welcome. This is the commander in chief of the Tristain fleet’”

La Ramée’s words were passed on to the sailor who was standing on the mast. The signaling flag for the message was then hoisted up.

The Albion fleet fired their cannons in salute. There were no shells inside the cannon, they had merely let gunpowder explode.

Though the Lexington fleet had done a mere cannon salute, the air around it shook. La Ramée retreated slightly. Even though he knew that live ammunition couldn't possibly reach across the distance separating them, the force of the cannons from the Lexington fleet was able to make the experienced admiral retreat.

“Fire our cannons in response.”

“How many shells shall we fire? For the top nobles, eleven is required.”

The number of shells to be fired depended upon the person’s rank and social status.

“Seven will do,” ordered La Ramée watching with a grin on his face like a stubborn child.

“Prepare the cannons! Seven shots, one by one! Fire when they’re ready!”

On the afterdeck of the Lexington, flagship of the fleet, Bowood was looking at the Tristain fleet. Next to him was Sir Johnston, the commander in chief, responsible for the entire invasion squad. Being a member of the council of nobles, Cromwell trusted him deeply. However, he had no experience. He was a politician after all.

“Captain…” Johnston said to Bowood in a worried voice.

“Sir?”

“Is it alright to go so close to them? We have those new long range cannons equipped right? Put some distance between us. His Excellency has entrusted me with important soldiers.”

“Cromwell’s puppet, huh…” Bowood whispered coldly to himself.

“Yes we do have the new cannon model, but if we fire from maximum range, they won’t hit.”

“But I bear his Excellency’s task of letting off those soldiers safely in Tristain. We can’t have the soldiers scared. Their morale will drop.”

I don't think it's the soldiers that are scared… Bowood thought.

Ignoring Johnston, he issued a new command. No law governs the sky, after all.

“Prepare the left cannons.”

“Yes sir! Prepare the left cannons!”

The sailors on the deck started to load the cannons with gunpowder and shells.

A thunderous roar could be heard from the Tristain fleet, which was aimed at the skies. Tristain was returning the cannon salute.

The battle plan had commenced.

During that moment, Bowood had turned into a soldier. The political details, his human feelings, the cowardice and foul play of this operation were all forgotten. As the captain of the Lexington fleet of The Republic of the Holy Albion, he proceeded to rapidly issue orders.

The crew of the old Hobart ship trailing at the end of the fleet had finished their preparations, and started to evacuate via the boats they had made levitate with the “Fly” spell.

A startling scene unfolded before La Ramée’s eyes. The ship trailing at the end… the oldest and one of the smallest ships had started to go up in flames.

“What? A fire? Was it an accident?” whispered Fevisu ()

The next instant, another startling thing occurred. The ship that was engulfed by flames exploded in the air.

The Albion ship was reduced to ruins and came crashing down to the ground.

“W-What is this? Did the fire reach the ammunition storage?”

The Mercator was in an uproar.

“Calm down! Calm down!” Fevisu () yelled at the sailors.

A signal flag was seen from the Lexington. A sailor started reading the signals with a telescope.

“From the Lexington fleet captain. Explain the meaning behind sinking Hobart.”

“Sinking? What is he saying?! It exploded by itself!”

La Ramée was panicking.

“Send a reply. ‘The fire from my ship was a response to your salute. The salvo didn’t contain any live shells’”

A reply was sent promptly by the Lexington.

“Your ship's attack used live ammunition. We shall return your intent of war.”

“What nonsense!”

La Ramée’s cry was drowned by the bombardment from the Lexington.

Impact. The mast of the Mercator broke off and a few holes were made in the deck.

“How can their cannons reach from such a distance?!” said a surprised Fevisu () on the shaking deck.

“Send a message! ‘Cease fire, we have no intent of war’”

The Lexington replied with a barrage of cannon shells.

Impact. The ship was shaking and fires had started here and there.

Like a shriek, Mercator’s message repeated over and over.

“We repeat! Cease fire! We have no intent of war!”

The Lexington’s fire showed no signs of stopping.

Impact. La Ramée’s body was sent flying out of Fevisu’s () sight.

The shock of the impact had thrown Fevisu () onto the floor. He suddenly realized that the attack was all planned. They never had any intention of a “good-willed visit” at all. They had all been deceived by Albion.

The ship started to go up in flames and the injured sailors groaned in pain. Shaking his head while standing up, Fevisu () yelled, “The commander in chief is dead! The flagship captain will now take control of the fleet! Damage report! Full speed ahead! Prepare the right cannons!”

“So they’ve finally realized.” Said Wardes, who was standing next to Bowood, as he leisurely watched the Tristain fleet. Wardes also believed the commander in chief, Johnston, didn't deserve the title and would be unable to do anything. Wardes was in effect, the commanding officer.

“Seems like it, Viscount. However, it seems we will win soon enough.”

The Albion fleet, which had superior mobility, had already taken action to suppress the full on charge of the Tristain fleet.

The Albion fleet kept a fixed distance, and continued firing their cannons. Their fleet numbered twice that of Tristain's and in addition they had the huge Lexington, which had the new cannon model. There was no contest in firepower.

As if they were tormenting the Tristain fleet, the Albion fleet continued their fire. The Mercator, which was already on fire, had started to slant. In an instant, the Mercator exploded with a deafening roar. None of the ships in the Tristain fleet were undamaged. The fleet was thrown into chaos with the loss of the flagship.

Destroying them was only a matter of time now. Ships could be seen flying their white flags already.

On the Lexington, cries of "Long live Albion! Long live the holy king Cromwell!" could be heard. Bowood knitted his eyebrows. During the days of the Royal Air force, no one used to say things like "Long live so and so" during battle. Even the commander in chief, Johnston had joined in.

"Captain, a new page in history has begun." Said Wardes

As if mourning for his enemies, who didn't even have a chance to cry out in pain, Bowood whispered, "No, only a war has begun."

Soon after the news that the entire Tristain fleet in La Rochelle had been wiped out arrived, a declaration of war was issued by Albion. It blamed Tristain for breaking the non-aggression treaty by attacking their fleet without reason, and stated "As an act of self-defense, The Holy Republic of Albion shall declare war on the kingdom of Tristain."

The palace, which had been busily occupied with Henrietta's departure for Germania, was thrown into a state of confusion from the turn of events.

The generals, cabinet ministers and other officials immediately held a meeting.

But the meeting was little more than a disordered ramble. Opinions that they should inquire Albion about the circumstances of the events, or that they should dispatch messengers requesting aid were thrown about.

Sitting in the meeting's seat of honor was a shocked Henrietta. She was wearing her beautiful wedding dress that had just been finished. She had originally planned to head to Germania by carriage after the dress was finished.

She was like a blooming flower in the meeting room. But no one even noticed.

"Albion states that our fleet attacked them first! However our fleet says they only did a cannon salute."

"Accidents can cause misunderstandings."

"Let's hold a meeting in Albion to sort this out! Perhaps there is still a chance to mend this misunderstanding!"

While the powerful nobles stated their opinions, the Cardinal Mazarini nodded.

"Right. Dispatch a special envoy to Albion. We will approach this cautiously, before it turns into a total war over a mere misunderstanding."

At that moment, an urgent report arrived.

The messenger carrying the letter from the carrier owl, rushed into the meeting room.

"It's an urgent report! After landing, the Albion fleet has started capturing land!"

"Where did they land?"

"The outskirts of La Rochelle! It seems like in the field of Tarbes!"

In the garden of her parents' house, Siesta hugged her young siblings, watching the skies with an uneasy face. An explosion had been heard not long before in the direction of La Rochelle. Surprised, she went out to the garden and saw the

dreadful scene in the sky. Numerous ships were on fire and sinking, crashing onto the mountain’s surface and dropping into the middle of the forest.

The village was in a state of confusion. A short while later, a large ship had descended from the sky. The ship, so large that it could be easily mistaken for a cloud, dropped its anchor on the field in the village.

Numerous dragons flew out of it.

“Sister, what’s happening?” asked her younger brothers and sisters.

“Let’s get in the house,” urged Siesta, hiding her fear.

Inside the house, her parents were looking out of the windows with troubled expressions.

“Isn’t that Albion's fleet?” her father said, looking at the ship anchored in the field.

“Could it be … A war?”

Her father shook his head.

“That’s not possible. We have a non-aggression treaty with Albion. The lord proclaimed it recently.”

“Then why is the sky full of sinking ships?”

The dragons flying above the ship headed towards the village. Her father grasped his wife and stepped away from the window. With loud cries, the dragons descended upon the village and set the houses on fire.

Her mother screamed. The house was alight and the glass from the windows scattered everywhere. The village was saturated in the blazing flames, roaring of the dragons and the shrieking of the people. Carrying her unconscious mother, the father turned to Siesta, who was shaking.

“Siesta! Take your siblings and run to the forest!”

Straddling a large wind dragon, a smile appeared on Wardes' face as he trampled on his home country. The dragoons under his command rode fire dragons. A wind dragon cannot match a fire dragon in power, but surpasses a fire dragon in speed. He had chosen the wind dragon solely because he was commanding. To clear the path for the main force, Wardes mercilessly set the village on fire. In the background, soldiers were dropping down one by one with ropes from the Lexington. The field was an excellent strategic foothold for the invading troops.

From the direction of the field, dozens of the neighboring lord's troops were charging forward. The Tristainian troops could pose a significant threat to the soldiers disembarking onto the field. Wardes signaled his underlings to crush the small opposition force. A barrage of fire magic flew from the dragons but still, the Tristainians ferociously charged forward. The reckless force was utterly devastated by the dragon's flames.

It was past noon. Reports of the events came bursting in the conference room.

"The lord of Tarbes has died in battle!"

"The scout sent to investigate the dragoons has not returned!"

"We still haven't received a reply from Albion regarding our enquiries!"

Meaningless discussions repeated themselves in the conference room.

"We should request aid from Germania!"

"Aggravating the matter like that would…"

"How about attacking them with our whole dragoon force?"

"Round up the remaining ships! All of them! No matter how old or small!"

"Let's dispatch a special envoy! Attacking them will only give them an excuse to

engage in a total war!”

The meeting could not reach an agreement. Mazarini was having difficulty coming to a conclusion himself. He was still hoping for a way to settle things diplomatically.

Amongst the heated debate, Henrietta looked at the wind ruby she wore on her ring finger. It was a memento from Wales. She was reminded of the man’s face she entrusted herself to.

Did I not vow upon this ring back then?

If my dear Wales has courageously died then… I too should live courageously.

“Tarbes is up in flames!”

She was surprised at her own voice but quickly regained her composure. With a deep breath, she stood up. Everyone looked at her. Henrietta spoke in a trembling voice.

“Aren’t you all ashamed of yourselves?”

“Princess?”

“Our lands are being captured by enemies. There are things we need to do before bickering about alliances and special envoys, isn’t there?"

“But… princess… It’s just some tension caused by a misunderstanding.”

“Misunderstanding? How can you still say that? Sinking a ship during a cannon salute is a bit extreme isn’t it?”

“We have signed a non-aggression treaty. It was an accident.”

“And that treaty is broken as easily as paper. They had no intention of keeping that treaty. It was just a lie to gain time. Albion’s actions clearly show that they have intention to war.”

“But…”

Henrietta hit the table and started yelling.

“The blood of our people is being spilled while we are doing this! Is it not the duty of nobles to protect them? For what reason do we bear royal and noble names? Have they not let us reign over them so we can protect them in times of need like this?”

Everyone was speechless. Henrietta continued with a cold voice.

“You’re all scared, aren’t you? Albion is a large country after all. If we counterattack our chances of winning are slim. Is it because you think you will be held responsible as one of the leaders of the counter attack after the battle is lost? You all plan to cower here to lengthen your lives?”

“Princess,” interjected Mazarini.

"However," Henrietta continued.

“I will ride forth. You can continue your meeting here.”

Henrietta burst out of the conference room. Mazarini and numerous nobles tried to hold her back.

“Princess! You should rest before your wedding!”

“Ugh! It’s so hard to run in this!”

Henrietta tore her wedding dress so that it was above her knees and threw the torn piece at Mazarini’s face.

“Perhaps you can go get married.”

“My carriage and my guards! Come!” she yelled when she reached the courtyard.

Her carriage was brought, led by the holy beasts, unicorns.

The remaining magical defense squad in the courtyard assembled at once on Henrietta’s call.

She unfastened one unicorn and straddled it.

“I shall command the troops! Regiments, assemble!”

Aware of the situation, every soldier saluted simultaneously.

Henrietta hit the unicorn’s stomach.

The unicorn magnificently raised its hooves up high under the bright sun and set off.

“Follow the princess!” cried the soldiers while following Henrietta, mounted on the beasts.

“Follow! A delay brings shame to the family name!”

The nobles in the courtyard dashed out. The word spread through the regiments scattered about the town.

Watching this absent mindedly, Mazarini looked up at the skies.

"I knew we would go to war with Albion someday, despite my efforts, but… our country is not prepared."

He was not concerned about his own life. He bore the worries of his country in his own way, and for the sake of the people, he had made his decision. Even if it meant a small sacrifice, he didn’t want to engage in a lost battle.

But, it was as the princess said. His efforts and devotion to diplomacy had been boiled away. Of what use is clinging to it? There are things to be taken care of first.

One of the high-class nobles whispered in Mazarini’s ear.

“Cardinal, about the special envoy…”

Mazarini slapped the nobles face with his cap. He coiled the torn piece from the wedding dress, which Henrietta had thrown at him, on his head.

“All of you! To your horses! If we let the princess go alone we will be forever cast in shame!”

Chapter Ten: The Void

News of the declaration of war had reached the Tristain Academy of Magic the following day. Contact had been delayed due to the chaos in the palace.

Louise, along with Saito, were waiting at the entrance of the Academy of Magic for a carriage from the palace. The carriage was to take them to Germania. However, only a breathless messenger arrived at the academy that hazy morning.

The messenger asked them where Osman's room was, and dashed away quickly after receiving the answer. The unusual scene caused Louise and Saito to look at each other. Sensing something had happened in the palace, the two of them rushed after the messenger.

Osman was occupied with the preparations for the wedding ceremony. He would be leaving the academy for a week and so he was organizing various documents and packing his luggage.

A loud knock came at the door.

"Who is it?"

The messenger from the palace burst into the room before Osman had finished talking.

"Reporting from the palace! Albion has declared war on Tristain! The princess' wedding has been postponed until further notice! Soldiers are currently heading towards La Rochelle! For safety reasons an order was issued stating that all students and staff are to be confined to the castle!"

Osman's face grew pale.

"A declaration of war? There's going to be a battle?"

“Yes! Enemy forces have set up camp in the fields of Tarbes and are glaring at our forces nearby La Rochelle.”

“The Albion forces must be very strong.”

The messenger replied sorrowfully.

“The enemy forces are a dozen in number led by a huge warship called the Lexington. The total number of troops is estimated to be around three thousand. Our main fleet has already been destroyed and counting all our troops, we only have around two thousand. We weren’t prepared for a war, so that was all we could field. However, the worst is that they have complete aerial dominance. Our troops will surely be decimated by their cannons."

“What’s the current situation?”

“The enemy dragoons are setting fire to the village of Tarbes… We requested aid from Germania, but they say the soonest they can arrive is in three weeks…”

Osman sighed and said, “… They’re planning to abandon us. During that period, Tristain’s towns will fall readily into the hands of the enemy.”

With their ears pressed against the door of the principal’s room, Louise and Saito looked at each other. Louise’s face had become pale at the mention of war, and Saito’s at the mention of Tarbes. *Isn’t that Siesta’s village?* Saito dashed off. Louise panicked and followed him.

Saito reached the courtyard and started climbing into the Zero fighter. Louise hugged his waist from behind.

“Where are you going?!”

“To Tarbes!”

“Why?!”

“Isn’t it obvious?! I’m going to go save Siesta!”

Louise grabbed his arm and tried to shake him off, but he firmly clung on.

“You can’t! It’s a war! Even if you went, it wouldn't make a difference!”

“I have this Zero fighter. The enemy is attacking with those airships right? This can fly too. I’ll figure something out.”

“What can you do with a toy like this?!”

“This isn’t a toy.”

Saito grabbed the Zero fighter’s wing with his left hand. His runes shone.

“This is a weapon from my world. It’s a tool for killing people. It’s not a toy.”

Louise shook her head.

“Regardless, whether this is a weapon from your world or not, there’s no way you can win against those large warships! Don’t you understand? You can’t make a difference! Just leave it to the soldiers!” said Louise, looking straight into Saito’s face.

This guy… this reckless familiar doesn’t know anything about war, Louise thought. This was different from the journey they took to Albion. The battlefield was a place filled with death and destruction. If a novice went, it would result only in his death.

“He said that Tristain’s fleet had been wiped out didn’t he?”

Saito slowly patted Louise on the head and spoke in a low voice.

“It might not amount to anything. I can’t imagine beating those warships. But…”

“But what?”

“I don’t fully understand, but I’ve received these legendary familiar powers. If I were just a normal, regular person, I wouldn’t have thought of going to save them. But it’s different. I have Gandálfr’s power. I might be able to save them. I can perhaps save Siesta… and those villagers.”

“The probability is almost zero.”

“I know. But, it’s not zero. So, I’ll do it.”

Surprised, Louise replied.

“Are you an idiot!? You want to return to your own world right? How is dying here going to help?!”

“Siesta treated me kindly. You too, Louise.”

Louise’s face turned red.

“I’m not from this world. I don’t necessarily have to care what happens to this world, but I want to at least protect the people who have treated me well.”

Louise noticed that Saito’s hands were shaking. Raising her head, she said, “Aren’t you scared? You idiot. Stop trying to act cool if you’re scared!”

“I am scared. I’m even reluctant to do this. But that prince said, the importance of protecting something, will make you forget the fear of death. I think he’s right. That time, when fifty thousand Albion soldiers came charging towards us… I wasn’t scared. I was busy thinking of protecting you, so I wasn’t scared. I’m not lying.”

“What are you saying? You’re just a commoner. You aren’t a courageous prince or anything.”

“I know. It’s got nothing to do with whether I’m a prince or a commoner. Which country you were born in, the time period… even which world, is irrelevant. If you are a man, then you would surely think the same way.”

Louise’s face started to distort as she tried to hold back her tears.

“If you die, what will I do…? No… I, if you die…”

“I won’t die. I will come back. If I die, I won’t be able to protect you right?”

“I’m going as well.”

“No. You’re staying here.”

“No, I’m going as well.”

“You can’t.”

As his hard-found courage was about to escape him, Saito separated himself from Louise and climbed into the cockpit from the wing.

Suddenly he realized. He hadn’t refueled the plane.

Saito left Louise there and rushed off to Colbert’s laboratory. With her fists tightly clenched, she groaned. Why was he so stubborn! *Even though I said it would be dangerous.*… Louise bit her lip and held back her tears. Nothing would come from crying. Louise looked at the Zero fighter.

“What chance does this thing have of winning against Albion’s forces!?”

Saito woke up the sleeping Colbert.

“Huh? What?”

“Mr. Colbert! Have you made the gasoline?”

“Huh? Yes, I’ve made the amount you needed. It’s over there.”

“Then help me carry it! Quickly!”

Colbert carried the gasoline for Saito. Colbert, who was still partially asleep, didn’t know about the war. Saito didn’t bother explaining.

“You’re going to fly it so early in the morning? At least let me freshen up.”

“We don’t have time for that.”

Louise was nowhere to be seen. He was relieved. If Louise had pleaded him to not go once more, his determination would fade. There was no reason why he wouldn’t be scared. The prince did say that the importance of protecting something would make the fear of death go away, but… nope. It was still scary.

Even then, Saito sat in the cockpit and performed the necessary operations to start the engine. Colbert then used his magic like before and the engine started to run. The engine started with a loud noise and the propellers started to spin.

He checked the gauges. The runes on his left hand told him that everything was normal. He checked the machine gun in front of him. Bullets were loaded. The machine guns on the wings were also loaded.

Releasing the brakes, the Zero fighter started moving. He looked to the front and headed in the direction of the best take-off spot. “Austri” was not a small courtyard but his Gándalfr runes told him that it was a bit short for a runway. At that moment, Derflinger, who was leaning in the cockpit, said, “Partner, tell the noble to use wind to propel you from the back.”

“Wind?”

“Yes, so that this thing can take off even with the shortened distance.”

“How do you know that? You don’t know a thing about airplanes.”

“This is a ‘weapon’ right? I’m with you all the time, I know about it in general. Have you forgotten? I’m ‘legendary’.”

Saito popped his head out from the windshield and called out to Colbert. His voice didn’t reach him. He tried some gestures, signaling him to cause wind to blow from the back. Colbert was quick witted. He understood Saito’s gestures and nodded.

As the incantation for the spell finished, a strong gust of wind came from the back. He put on the goggles Siesta entrusted him and relaxed the pressure on the brake. He opened the cowl flaps and adjusted the propeller’s pitch lever. He further released the brakes and he pushed the throttle lever down.

Like a spring, the Zero fighter accelerated forward with great force. He pushed the control stick slightly forward. The tail had left the ground. The Zero fighter was gliding. It approached the academy’s walls. Saito gulped.

“Partner! Now!”

Just as they were about to hit the wall, he pulled the control stick. The Zero

fighter flew up in an instant. Grazing the wall slightly, the zero fighter flew in the air. He retracted the landing gear. The indicator light, bottom left from the gauges turned from green to red.

The zero fighter continued to ascend. Saito looked at the runes with a relieved expression.

“Wow! It’s flying! This is pretty interesting!” Derflinger said excitedly.

“Of course it is. It was made to fly.”

Under the bright sun, the zero fighter split the winds, and rose up into the sky of another world.

The fire consuming Tarbes had calmed but the area had changed into a cruel battlefield. Battalions had been assembled in the field and were awaiting the moment they would clash with Tristain troops in the port city La Rochelle. Protecting them above were the Lexington's dragons. The Tristain dragoons would attack sporadically, but they had all been forced to retreat.

Before the battle, Albion's command decided that they would use the cannons of the warships to deal with the Tristain troops. And so, the fleet prepared its cannons.

One dragoon on the lookout above Tarbes noticed an enemy dragoon was approaching from above, about two thousand five hundred meters away. The dragoon had the dragon cry out, alerting the others that an enemy was approaching.

Saito looked out from the windshield and saw Tarbes below him. There was no trace of that simple, beautiful village he had seen before. The houses were scorched with black smoke rising from them. He clenched his teeth. He

remembered how recently he and Siesta were looking out at the field. Siesta's words replayed in his head.

"Isn't this field beautiful? This is what I wanted to show Saito."

A dragoon unit breathed fire at the forest located at the outskirts of the village. The forest was instantly set ablaze.

Saito bit his lip. He could taste the blood in his mouth.

"I'll kill you." He said in a low voice.

Saito pushed the control stick to the bottom left while pressing the throttle firmly. The Zero fighter started to swoop down towards Tarbes.

"What could one dragoon possibly do?" muttered the ascending dragoons as they prepared to attack.

However, it had an unusual figure. It had two horizontal wings stretched out, as if the wings were fixed and didn't flap. It also made a thunderous roar they had never heard of before.

Did such a dragon exist in Halkeginia?

However… no matter what dragon it was, it would be finished off with a single breath from the Albion fire dragons, just like the rest. When its wings were burnt it would probably go down. Using this strategy, they had already killed two of Tristain's dragoons.

"This is the third," said a dragoon awaiting the descending enemy, with the corner of his mouth bending into a smile.

He was surprised. It was fast. Faster than any dragon.

Panicking, the dragoon made the dragon breathe fire. At that moment, the wing of the descending enemy flashed. Countless number of shining white things were flying towards him. Large holes appeared on the wings and the body of the dragon. A round entered the dragon's mouth. A fire dragon has pockets of oil for strong combustion in its throat. The autocannon shell caught one of the oil pockets. The fire dragon exploded.

Slipping by the dragon that had exploded in midair, Saito continued to descend in the Zero fighter. The fighter's machine gun range was tens of times than that of the dragon's breaths. Letting his rage take control of him, he fired the 20mm autocannon shells and the 7.7mm machine gun on both wings at the dragoons.

Four more dragons fluttered in the skies above the village. They had seen the dragon which exploded from the enemy's attack. The attack wasn't a breath. Which meant that it was probably a magic based attack. Whatever attack it may have been, one dragoon alone can't do anything. Three dragoons ascended to attack.

"Three more are coming from the bottom left," said Derflinger in his usual tone.

Three dragoons were spread out below him and ascending.

"Don't get hit by their breath. You'll get burnt to ashes in an instant."

Saito nodded. He did a hundred and eighty degrees turn above the dragoons. Drawing a path similar to spiraling down a funnel in a bottle, he ended up behind the dragoons. The dragoons couldn't catch up. The speed of the fire dragons was about 150km/hr. The zero fighter's speed was close to 400km/hr. It was like attacking something that wasn't moving.

By the time the panicking dragoons had turned around, they had already been clearly targeted. Saito readied the pointer on the glass pane of the sighting device and pressed the throttle lever's fire button.

With a dull sound followed by the shaking of the plane, the autocannons on both wings opened fire. The wings of the fire dragons broke, and they went spiraling down. In the next instant, Saito had put his foot down on the right foot bar and glided the Zero fighter, taking aim at the next dragon. Saito fired again. Taking

numerous hits from the autocannon on its torso, the fire dragon shrieked in pain and dropped towards the ground.

When the third had suddenly dived in an attempt to escape, the 7.7mm machine gun filled its body with punctured holes. The fire dragon died and dropped straight down.

Saito quickly made the airplane ascend, controlling the plane naturally. He switched the velocity level to high. Against dragons, the Zero fighter which had a reciprocating engine, had the most advantage at those speeds. As the Zero fighter descended, the velocity would increase. The first thing to do was to control the area above the enemy. With the shining runes on his left hand, he maneuvered the Zero fighter like a veteran.

Derflinger, who was looking out for him, told him his next target. Just as he was about to direct the plane there, he heard a voice behind him.

“T-T-T-That’s incredible! These Albion dragons are reputed to be unrivaled yet they’re dropping like flies!”

Startled, Saito looked backwards. Louise’s head popped out from the gap between the seat and the rest of plane. Behind the seat was originally a stupidly big radio, but since this world didn’t have anyone who could contact him through the radio, he had removed it while he was adjusting the plane. After taking that off, only the wires connected to the rudder were left. Louise had slipped in there.

“You were here all this time!? Get off!”

“There’s no way I can get off now!”

Louise’s hands held the Founder’s Prayer Book. It seemed like she didn’t go anywhere like he had thought and instead slipped inside the plane.

“It’s dangerous! You idiot!”

Louise firmly wrung his neck.

“Don’t forget!"

"You. Are. My. Familiar. So. Don’t. Just. Go. Do. What. You. Want! I. Will. Not. Forgive. You. Understand!?”

As the engine drowned out her voice, she shouted in his ears.

“I’m your master! If the master doesn't lead the way, then the familiar won’t listen! And I would hate that!”

Saito drooped his shoulders, sighing heavily. It seems that saying things like “It’s dangerous, don’t come” had absolutely no effect on Louise.

“What happens if you die?!”

“Then try harder! Even if you or I die, I will still find some way to kill you!” She shouted at Saito with her eyes open.

Saito felt a headache coming from the absurd things coming out of her mouth.

“Partner, sorry for interrupting but…”

“What?”

“Ten from the right have just arrived.”

The fire dragon’s breath came flying to them. At that instant, he pushed the control stick quickly to the left. The plane rolled and dodged the breath of the dragon. Louise fell down in the plane with a small cry.

“Control it more elegantly!”

Saito shouted, “Don’t say ridiculous things!”, and made the plane descend. The dragoons couldn’t follow his movements. Taking advantage of this moment, he made the plane ascend, and at its peak he turned it around. With the sun behind him, he descended again. Aiming at the dragoons who were chasing him before, he fired the autocannons and the machine guns at them.

Louise, who had fallen down in the plane, was about to cry from the terror. “Perhaps I really shouldn’t have come?” Her fear asked her. She bit her lip and grasped the Founder’s Prayer Book tightly. *Didn’t I sneak on because I couldn’t let Saito die? Hey, don’t pretend as if you’re fighting alone, I’m also fighting!*

Even so, she couldn’t do anything. It was always like this, but this time she felt a tinge of regret.

But nevertheless, losing to your fear won’t accomplish anything.

She searched her pockets for the Water Ruby ring Henrietta gave her, and put it on. She grasped that finger tightly.

“Princess, please protect us…” she whispered.

She patted the Founder’s Prayer Book in her right hand softly.

In the end, she hadn’t finished the edict. She cursed her own lack of poetic talent. She was hoping to think of the edict on the carriage to Germania.

That’s right. I was going to go to Henrietta’s wedding ceremony. I was waiting outside the academy’s gates for the carriage to arrive. I then learned war had broken out. Destiny is a cynical thing. She opened the Founder’s Prayer Book while muttering to herself. She was planning to pray to the Founder for their safety. She opened the book and flipped to a random page. The Water Ruby and the Founder’s Prayer Book suddenly shone, taking Louise by surprise.

“They got… wiped out? In only twelve minutes they got wiped out?”

Sir Johnston, the supreme commander of the invasion force, who was on the afterdeck of the flagship, Lexington, looking over the preparations of the bombardment attack with the ship’s cannons, turned pale at the report.

“How many enemy units were there? A hundred? Tristain has that many dragoons left?”

“Sir. A-According to the report, only one.”

“A single unit?”

Johnston stood motionless with a dumbfounded expression. He threw his hat to

the ground.

“Nonsense! Twenty dragoons taken out by a single enemy unit? Surely you jest!”

Frightened at the supreme commander’s attitude, the messenger took a step back.

“According to the report, the enemy dragoon had incredible speed and agility, and also had strong, long ranged, magic based attacks. Our units were killed one by one…”

Johnston grabbed the messenger.

“What about Wardes?! Wardes, who was given command of the dragoons, what about him?! What happened to that cocky Tristainian?! Was he also killed?!”

“The viscount’s wind dragon was not included in the list of casualties. But… it seems like he wasn’t seen around…”

“So he betrayed us! Or otherwise he was too much of a coward! Whichever it was, we can’t trust him…”

Quietly reaching out his hands, Bowood said, “Reacting like that in front of all the soldiers will lower their morale, commander in chief.”

Enraged, Johnston took his anger out on Bowood.

“What are you saying? It’s your fault that the dragoons got wiped out! Your lack of competence was just asking for our precious dragoons to be destroyed! I will report this to His Excellency. I will report it!” Johnston yelled as he reached out to grab Bowood.

Bowood drew his wand and jabbed Johnston’s stomach. The white of his eyes showing, Johnston fainted to the ground. He ordered the soldiers to carry him away.

Should have just made him sleep in the first place, Bowood thought.

Noise apart from that of explosions and cannons only agitated the troops. A single decision could be the difference between victory and defeat, especially

during battle.

Bowood turned to the messenger who was staring at him with a worried expression. He spoke with a calm, composed voice.

“Even though the dragoon force has been wiped out, the Lexington is still undamaged. Also, Wardes has probably devised a plan. Don’t worry about it, just put effort in what you’re doing.”

“A single unit killing twenty units? A hero, eh…” Bowood whispered.

But at most a hero. And thus only an individual. No matter how much power an individual holds, there’ll be things he can change and things he can’t change.

“And this ship is the latter,” Bowood whispered.

He issued orders.

“Advance the entire fleet. Prepare the left cannons.”

After a while, far away, at the other end of the field of Tarbes, the battle array of Tristain’s troops, situated in La Rochelle, which was a natural stronghold due to the mountains around it, could be seen.

“All fleets advance slowly. Ship to starboard.”

The fleet turned so that the Tristain forces would be facing their left side.

“Fire the left cannons. Continue firing until further orders.”

“Upper part and the lower part, prepare the right cannons. Use grapeshot.”

Five hundred meters in front of the Tristain troops crowded within La Rochelle, the enemy force could be seen. It had the three colored Reconquista flag, and was approaching quietly. Having never actually seen an enemy before, Henrietta, mounted on a unicorn, was shaking. She closed her eyes to offer a prayer so that the soldiers around her wouldn’t see her shaking in fear.

But… her fear did not stop so easily.

Henrietta looked up at the large enemy fleet and turned pale. It was Albion’s fleet. The side of the fleet flashed. It was enemy fire. The cannon shells accelerated by gravity were flying towards Tristain’s troops.

Impact.

Hundred of cannon shells dropped down on the troops in La Rochelle. Rocks, horses and people were thrown together, sent flying through the air. The troops were trying to flee from the overwhelming might before them. The place was drowned by the sound of thunderous roars.

“Calm down! Everyone calm down!” Henrietta shouted, driven by her fear.

Mazarini whispered in Henrietta’s ear.

“You need to calm down first. If the general is distraught, there’ll be chaos in the blink of an eye.”

Mazarini quickly whispered to the generals nearby. While Tristain was a small country, it was one filled with history. Its history included many righteous nobles. Of all the Halkaganian nations, the Tristain army had the highest percentage of mages within it's ranks.

By Mazarini’s command, the nobles created barriers of air within the openings of the mountains. The shells would hit them and break. But some of the shells got through. Screams could be heard with rocks and blood scattering.

“As soon as the enemy stops their bombardment, they will most likely stage an all out assault. There’s no other way but to face them,” whispered Mazarini.

“Is there a chance of being victorious?”

Mazarini noticed that the soldiers were starting to tremble before the enemy bombardment. They had advanced with great vigor but… there are limits to people’s courage. He did not want to tell the truth to the princess who had made him remember something he had forgotten.

“We’re evenly matched.”

Impact. The ground below them shook like an earthquake.

Marzarini sorrowfully understood the situation.

Three thousand strong troops formed the enemy's numbers, while their forces, crumbling from the bombardment, only numbered two thousand.

They had no chance.

Louise looked at the letters that appeared in the light.

It was… written in ancient runes. As Louise took lessons seriously, she could read the ancient language.

Louise chased the letters in the light.

Foreword.

Henceforth, I shall record the truth I know. All materials in the world are comprised of fine grains. The four branches intervene with these fine grains and apply an influence, which transform them into spells. This was how "Fire", "Water", "Wind" and "Earth" were formed.

Louise was filled with curiosity. With an impatient feeling, she turned the page.

The gods bestowed upon me a greater strength. The fine grains, which the four branches bore influence over, are comprised of even finer grains. The power bestowed upon me by the gods, does not belong to any of the four. The branch I wield intervenes with even finer grains and applies an influence, transforming them into spells. A Zero that belongs to neither of the four. This so-called Zero is "Void". I name the Zero the gods have bestowed upon me "Void".

"The branch of Void… Isn't that a legend? Isn't that the legendary branch?!"

Whispering to herself, Louise turned the page. Her pulse was racing.

Saito, who had wiped out the dragoon fleet, looked over the sky. Above the

fields, he spotted the large warship between the gaps of the clouds, far away. Below that ship, was the port city La Rochelle.

“Partner, that’s the head. No matter how many small fry you take down, if you don’t take it down… nothing will change…”

“I know.”

“It’s impossible.”

Saito remained silent and opened the throttle of the zero fighter. It was at full boost. The zero fighter ascended towards the large warship.

“It’s impossible, partner. No matter how much you try, it is impossible.”

Derflinger, who had evaluated the power difference, told Saito in his usual tone. However, Saito did not respond.

“I understand… but your partner is an idiot.”

Saito brought the Zero fighter closer.

The right side of the ship shone. Aimed at Saito’s zero fighter, something was flying towards him. They were countless numbers of lead bullets. They pierced the plane with holes while shaking it. Breaking the windshield, a shard grazed Saito’s cheek. A trickle of blood ran down his face.

“Don’t go near it! They're using grapeshot!” yelled Derflinger.

Saito made the Zero fighter do a sudden dive, avoiding the second round of fire.

“Damn, they put small bullets in those large cannons!”

Saito bit his lip.

He couldn't even get close to the ship, much less sink it.

Behind the seat, Louise had lost herself in reading the Founder’s Prayer book. The thunderous noises did not reach her ears. She could only hear her own pulse getting louder and louder.

The one who is able to read this, will inherit my deeds, thoughts and objectives. They will become the bearer of this power. Be mindful, wielder of this power. For my brethren and I, who have died unfulfilled, you should strive towards retaking the "Holy Lands" stolen by heathens. "Void" is powerful. Yet, the incantations are of great length and consume much energy. Take heed, incantator. At times, your life will diminish depending on the power. Thus, I choose the reader of this book. Even when one not qualified wears the ring, they cannot open this book. Only when the chosen reader wears a ring of "The four branches" can they open this book.

Brimir Ru Rumiru Yuru Viri Vee Varutori (
)

Following, are my recordings of the "Void" spells I used. The first step of the very beginning. "Explosion".

A spell in the ancient language followed after that. Dumbfounded, Louise whispered, "Founder Brimir, aren't you forgetting something? If I wasn't wearing this ring, I wouldn't be able to read the Founder's Prayer Book right? The stuff about the chosen reader… and the "take heed" section has no meaning then."

And then she realized. Chosen reader… that means…

I'm the chosen reader?

I don't really understand but… I can read the words. If I can read it, I can probably perform this spell written here. Louise remembered how every time she recited an incantation, an explosion would result. That's… in other words, that's the "Void" written about here?

When she thought about it, no one could tell her the reason why she made things explode. Her parents, her sisters, her teachers… her friends as well… they only laughed at her for being a "failure". They didn't think anything of the explosions.

Perhaps I really am the chosen reader.

I can't really believe it, but I perhaps am the chosen reader.

This might be worth trying out.

And also… There's nothing else to fall back on now.

She was calm and cool. The runes she had just looked at were on the tip of her tongue as if they had greeted one another many times.

Like the lullabies she had heard in the past, the spell's tune was somewhat similar.

I'm going to try it.

Louise stood up.

From behind the seat, she started making her way to the front through the gap.

"What are you doing?! Just stay still! Argh! I can't see in front of me! Hey!"

Like a snake, she slipped through with the gap with her small body. She made her way to the front of the seat, where Saito was sitting. She sat her small bottom down in between Saito's widened legs.

"…I can't believe it but… I can't really say it but… I might have been chosen. This could be some mistake though." Louise muttered.

"Hah?"

"Just listen to me. Fly near the warship. It might just be a hoax… but trying it out is better than not doing anything. Besides, there's no other way to sink that warship…. The only way is for me to do it. I understand. I'll try it."

Saito was dumbfounded by Louise's ramble to herself.

"Are you alright? You've finally gone crazy from being scared?"

Louise shouted at Saito.

"I told you to go near it didn't I?! I'm your master! Familiars obey their master's orders obediently!"

It was useless to oppose Louise when she used that threatening attitude. Saito

reluctantly approached the large warship.

The grapeshot flew towards them. Going around to the left side would probably have the same result. The ship also had cannons sticking out from the bottom as well. The Lexington was like a porcupine with cannons.

“What are you doing?!”

“It’s impossible! I can’t get near it!”

As if suddenly thinking of something, Derflinger opened its mouth.

“Partner, go straight above the ship.”

“Eh?”

“There’s a blind spot there. It’s where the cannons can’t reach.”

Saito rose above the Lexington like he was told.

Louise straddled Saito’s shoulders. She opened the canopy. A strong wind blew across her face.

“Hey what are you doing?! Close it!”

“Until I give you the signal, keep circling around here.”

Louise took a deep breath and closed her eyes.

Then, as if she were flaring up, she opened her eyes and started to read the runes written in the Founder’s Prayer Book.

She read the spell amongst the roar of the engine. Saito was circling above the Lexington in the Zero fighter like he was told.

It was at that moment.

“Partner, behind you!”

Quickly looking behind, a dragoon could be seen flying towards them like a gale.

It was Wardes.

Mounted on top of the wind dragon, Wardes grinned. He had been hidden amongst the clouds above the Lexington, waiting for his chance to strike. So this was the mysterious dragoon who had crushed all the fire dragons. Wardes didn’t have much chance of winning if he faced him front on. Which is why he had to aim for a weak spot.

His plan hinged on the warship. The enemy’s aim would definitely be this warship. And if he was a skilled enemy, he would be able to find its blind spot. Thus, hiding nearby and waiting was the best option. Wardes' prediction was right.

His target started to dive.

I see… he avoided the fire dragons like that.

But, my wind dragon’s speed is greater than that of the fire dragons.

Wardes steadily shortened the distance separating them.

With deep interest, he looked at the Zero fighter.

It’s not a dragon. That’s… not something made from Halkeginia’s logic… the “Holy Lands”?

He saw a familiar face, with pinkish blond hair, inside the cockpit. The grin on Wardes' face grew larger.

So you’re alive.

Then the one controlling the psuedo-dragon would be…

The left arm he had once lost throbbed.

His wind dragon’s breath wasn’t of any use, but he had his powerful spells. Gripping the reins with his artificial left hand, Wardes cast a spell. 'Air Spear'.

The air solidified to form a spear to skewer them.

Saito couldn’t lose the dragon that was following them. With Louise riding his shoulders, Saito was beginning to feel frustrated. *But… if I die here, I won’t be able to protect Louise or Siesta.* The runes on Saito’s left hand shone brightly.

He set the throttle to minimum and opened all the flaps. As if something had grabbed the Zero fighter, its speed dropped.

He pushed the control stick to the bottom left. At the same time, he stepped on the foot bar. The vivid earth and sky rotated before them.

The Zero fighter had disappeared from Wardes' sight, who had just finished casting his spell. He looked around him restlessly. They weren't anywhere to be seen. However, sensing a tinge of a murderous intent from behind , Wardes' turned around. The Zero fighter was smoothly spiraling down as if tracing a path inside a bottle. It quickly got behind Wardes’ wind dragon. Followed by a bright light, the machine gun bullets tore through the wind dragon, which had thinner scales than the fire dragons. Wardes was hit in the shoulder and back and his face distorted in pain. The wind dragon gave out a shriek. As if slowly gliding down, the dragon Wardes rode crashed to the ground.

Saito ascended the Zero fighter once more. Even while he did those maneuvers Louise straddled onto Saito’s shoulders firmly. Then again, Louise was very skilled at horse riding. Louise continued her incantation in a low voice. *What the heck is she doing*, Saito thought.

"Eoruu Suunu Firu Yarunsakusa"

A rhythm had started pulsating through Louise. She felt as though she knew the rhythm from somewhere. With every word of the incantation, the rhythm grew stronger. It sharpened her senses, while not a single noise around reached her ears. It was as if something within her body was born, and was searching for a destination… Louise remembered what she was told once. When you recite an incantation of your own branch, a feeling similar to what she was feeling would be felt. Is it really what I’m feeling? Me, who has always been despised for

being a zero. Me, who was said to have no talent in magic by teachers, parents, sisters and students. Is this the real me?

"Osu Suunu Uryu Ru Rado"

She could feel a wave being born inside of her, slowly swelling.

"Beoozusu Yuru Suvyueru Kano Oshera"

The wave inside her, searching for a destination, went berserk. Louise gave Saito a signal with her leg. Saito nodded and pushed the control stick down. The Zero fighter began to swoop down at the Lexington below them. Opening her eyes, she timed her incantation.

“Void”

The legendary branch of magic.

I wonder how powerful it is?

No one knows.

Of course, there’d be no reason I’d know.

This was supposedly beyond legendary.

"Jera Isa Unjyuu Hagaru Beookun Iru…"

After the long incantation, the spell was complete. At that moment, Louise understood the power of the spell. It would swallow everyone. Every person in her vision, would be swallowed by her spell. There were two options. Kill, or don’t kill. What was she meant to destroy? With the winds blowing against her face, she looked down. A large warship appeared before her eyes. The Lexington. Following her impulse, she aimed at a single point and swung her wand down.

An unbelievable scene unfolded before Henrietta’s eyes. The warship that had

been bombarding them… A ball of light had appeared in the sky. It was like a smaller version of the sun, and it expanded. And… it swallowed it. It had swallowed the warship in the sky. The light continued to expand until it was all she could see. There was complete silence. Henrietta suddenly closed her eyes. The light of the sphere was so intense that anyone would think that their eyes would burn from staring at it. And then… after the light had faded, the whole fleet was on fire. The fleet led by the Lexington had all their sails and decks burning. As if it were a lie, the head of the fleet that had been tormenting the Tristain troops sank to the ground.

A tremor in the earth could be felt. The fleet had come crashing down. Henrietta was dumbfounded. Complete silence overcame them. Everyone stared at the unbelievable scene.

The first one to come to his senses was Cardinal Mazarini. He was looking at the silvery wings, shining under the sun in the sky. It was Saito's zero fighter.

Mazarini cried out, "People! Look! The enemy fleet has been destroyed by the legendary Phoenix!"

"Phoenix? The immortal bird?"

A commotion spread through the troops.

"Look at that bird flying in the sky! That's the legendary bird that's said to come at Tristain's hour of need! The Phoenix! The Founder have blessed us!"

Shouts of joy could be heard everywhere.

"Long live Tristain! Long live the Phoenix!"

Henrietta asked Mazarini quietly, "Cardinal, the Phoenix… was it the truth? I haven't heard of anything called the legendary Phoenix…"

Mazarini mischievously smiled.

"It's a big lie. But, everyone's sense of judgement is lost at the moment. They can't believe the scene they saw. Neither can I. However, the truth is that there was an unfamiliar bird fluttering about after the enemy fleet had fallen. There was no choice but to use it."

“Hah…”

“What? No one cares if what I said was the truth or a lie. What they do care about is whether they’re dead or alive. In other words, victory or defeat.”

Mazarini peered into the princess’s eyes.

“You must use everything that you can use. It’s one of the basics of politics and war. Remember it well, Princess. Because from today onwards, you are the ruler of Tristain.”

Henrietta nodded. It was just as the Cardinal had said. The thinking… could come later.

“The enemy’s morale will be low and they will no doubt be trying to flee. Their supporting fleet is now gone. There’s not a better chance to strike.”

“Yes.”

“Princess. Shall we go forwards to victory?” asked Mazarini.

Henrietta nodded strongly once again. She held up her shining crystal wand.

“All troops, charge! Royal troops, follow me!”

Tired, Louise cuddled with Saito.

“Hey Louise.”

“Hm?” replied Louise, absentmindedly.

A feeling of fatigue overcame her. But this was a nice tired feeling. It was fatigue that came with the satisfaction of accomplishing something.

“Can I ask you something?”

“Yeah.”

“What was that just then?”

“It’s a legend.”

“Legend?”

“I’ll explain later. I’m tired.”

Saito nodded and smiled. He patted Louise gently on the head.

Below them, the Tristain troops had just charged at the Albion forces. The vigor of the Tristain troops was obvious even to a novice. It was vigor that would triumph even against enemies that outnumbered them.

“Yeah, later is fine.”

Looking at the scorched and blackened village, Saito wondered if Siesta was alright.

That evening… With her siblings, Siesta timidly came out of the forest. News that the Albion troops had been defeated reached the village people who had taken shelter in the forest.

Albion's troops were crushed by Tristain’s charge, and many had surrendered. Well, there weren’t any Albion soldiers strutting along the village around noon. The angry bellows, the clash of arms and the explosions had ended. Black smoke rose from the field, but the battle had ended.

A thunderous noise could be heard in the skies above. After looking up, a familiar object was flying in the sky. It was the “Dragon’s Raiment”. Siesta’s

face brightened.

When the Zero fighter landed on the field, Saito opened the canopy. Someone from the forest, south of the village, came running towards him. It was Siesta. Saito jumped off the Zero fighter and ran towards her.

Louise watched Saito as he was running off and sighed. "Well, I guess it’s good that that girl is still alive, but couldn’t he spend more time consoling me? The spell just then… “Explosion” of the Void magic branch. It seems like it didn't happen. Perhaps it doesn't feel real because it was Void magic. Am I really the “User of Void magic”? Is there some misunderstanding? But it explained how I was able to give Saito the legendary Gandálfr familiar powers. There are lots of legends, aren’t there," she whispered.

"In any case, it’ll probably be busy from here on. I really feel as if this didn't happen… and I can’t believe that I’m the one mentioned in the legend…" Louise sighed. *If this were a dream, I would be so relieved. But I’ve decided not to think too much about it. I should learn from that idiot familiar of mine. Although he’s the legendary familiar, he doesn’t seem like it at all. But perhaps that is for the best. Anyway, this “legend” stuff is too much for me.*

“Hey, legendary mage.”

“What, legendary sword?”

Derflinger had called out to Louise in a teasing tone.

“It’s okay to be stubborn… but if you don’t go after him, he’ll get taken by that village girl.”

Louise’s cheeks went red.

“I don't mind.”

“Really?” whispered Derflinger.

Giving a cry of frustration Louise hopped out of the cockpit and chased after Saito. Derflinger watched Louise’s running figure and said in large voice.

“And she even understands that she’s the one mentioned in the legend… Perhaps

her love life is more important to her. Humans around this age are beyond help."

While running, a stream of thoughts ran through her mind. When she looked at Saito’s back, her pulse hastened. Her mind would go blank. It was weird. *That idiot. He even kissed me. Is that girl really that good? She might be cute. She’s good at cooking as well. I know boys like girls like that. But, I…I…*

The Founder’s Prayer Book, the Void magic branch… they completely left Louise’s mind for the time being.

If I don’t go after that familiar of mine, he’ll be gone somewhere.

If I don’t open my eyes wide and run, I’ll be left behind.

But, if it’s going to be like that… I’ll just continue chasing him.

I’ll chase him wherever he goes… and when he turns around, I’ll hit him good.

1. ↑ "When the wind blows, those who sell barrels prosper": , means "Bliss often falls into the hands of an unexpected person. Actually, it's meaning is: When the wind blows (typhoons), the barrel maker (or seller) gets rich. Barrels were used to bury the dead.